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THE WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY REVIEW

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Vol. VIII, No. 2

Spring, 1957

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FICTION

JOHN WAIN

Samuel Deronda

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CHARLES BLACK

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ESSAY

DONALD PEARCE

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John Wain

SAMUEL DERONDA*

A Prefatory Note

When I first sent this light-hearted fable to be considered by the editors of *Shenandoah*, I thought it stood in no need of explanation or commentary, beyond the mere mention of its having originally been written for the *Spectator*, London. It so happens, however, that recent months have seen the rise of a new kind of literary journalism in England—a kind that deals almost entirely in personalities, and regards writers as *characters* first and artists only second, and a bad second at that. Thus I have seen an article in a Sunday newspaper in which the writer explained that Kingsley Amis and I were significant not for what we had written but for our personal characteristics, of which he proceeded to give a (to me) astonishing account. So far, the thing seemed to me merely funny; but at about the same time, the *Spectator* published a silly and vulgar sketch, signed by an obvious pseudonym, called *At The Poetry Reading*, in which a great many of my friends (and, for that matter, I myself) were made fun of in a heavy-handed fashion. This, again, barely interested me; but I found to my dismay that I was widely held to have been the author of this article, and the more I denied it the more firmly it stuck (the real author, of course, had no taste for truthfulness). In re-publishing my own fragment of literary satire, therefore, it seemed to me necessary to say what I thought had been obvious: namely, that my malice is towards attitudes, ways of thought, and intellectual positions; never towards people. *Samuel Deronda* is the story of how a typical

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charlatan (English version) gets into a position of power; I wrote it to illustrate the workings of the literary machine in London, and naturally concentrated (for this was satire) on the defects of that machine. This object could, of course, be more easily achieved if I excluded all particular reference to this or that person, and stuck to generalised types. This I have done, and neither malice nor ingenuity will be able to establish the contrary.

January, 1956

Samuel Deronda's parents had never heard of George Eliot, so that it was no more than a coincidence that they did not have their only son christened Daniel, particularly as, in matters of nomenclature, they were both rather drawn to the Biblical: Mr. Deronda's name was Jesse, and by another odd coincidence his wife's was Jessie. This was obviously impossible as a working arrangement; quite soon after their marriage in 1926, they had ceased to find amusement in the small confusions that naturally arose from the homophonous nature of their Christian names. "How's Jesse?" a visiting neighbor asked of Mr. Deronda, this being a well-understood convention in demotic English and meaning "How are *you*?" But Mr. Deronda, while perfectly well understanding this linguistic convention, would flush darkly and mutter, "She's very well"; alternatively, he might guess rightly, but in either case the nervous strain was not worth the small sociability; particularly as it was most people's idea of a joke, having made or caused some such mistake once in all seriousness, to repeat it the next time they called, for the sake of a laugh. There was a laugh in it for them, but not for Mr. and Mrs. Deronda, who spent almost the whole night discussing the situation on August 20, 1926. "It's no good, Jesse," said Mrs. Deronda, sitting in front of the glass and clipping pins into her hair to make it look curly the next morning (they had not been married many weeks and she still took a good deal of care over her appearance, except at night), "one of us will have to be called something else, and it had better be me, what with you being the Man." Mr. Deronda, who was already

in bed, rolled on to his back and considered for a moment the idea of being the man; then he replied, "I've got it, Jessie. I can be called Jess. It's quite common, that is. With a man, I mean." But this did not please Mrs. Deronda, who had ideas about the relative positions of the sexes rather similar to those held by D. H. Lawrence. "You're the Man, Jesse," she urged. "It wouldn't do to curtail you." She seldom used unusual words such as "curtail," and Mr. Deronda had to search his memory for the precise meaning of the word, he having left school in 1916 and gone to work in a fruit warehouse, having no difficulty in obtaining employment, despite the shortage of fruit during the war, owing to his natural ability and the fact that most of the men were away in France. He had not much time for reading at the warehouse, and his vocabulary was small. "I couldn't dock you of a syllable, Jesse," said Mrs. Deronda, who was very fond of her husband and wished to look up to him, at any rate in a metaphorical sense, the literal sense being impracticable owing to superior height, which she attributed to having been brought up, as a girl, in the bracing air of Watford. They now lived in North London, handy for Mr. Deronda's warehouse, but not bracing. "You'll have to go on being called Jesse, and I'll have to have another name than 'Jessie,'" she said. After she got into bed they lay staring at the ceiling with the set expressions of people properly conscious that they were facing a lifelong decision. Whatever name they thought of, Mrs. Deronda would have to be known by it permanently; people would only make a joke if she chopped and changed. "What about Edith?" Mr. Deronda asked, but she interrupted him with a sudden cry of "Martha!" "Martha? You're sure you like Martha?" Mr. Deronda asked. "It's in the Bible," she told him. "So's Edith," he affirmed, assuming a confidence he did not feel. This she denied, and they argued over the point for a very long time, considering that Mr. Deronda had to be up in the morning early to go to the warehouse. Is "Edith" in the Bible or not? was the question that perplexed them. Mrs. Deronda might have acquiesced, and accepted the name "Edith," only she wanted a name that was in the Bible, like her husband's.

The next day, when Mr. Deronda was out at the warehouse,

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Mrs. Deronda took down the family Bible and looked carefully through it, trying to find (or, to be precise, trying to establish the absence of) the name "Edith." She was not the kind of person who understood about indexes and concordances and things of that sort; she knew no other way of settling such a point than leafing slowly through the Bible until she had looked on every page for the name "Edith." This took her many weeks, but one evening she was able to announce to Mr. Deronda, on his return from the warehouse, that the name "Edith" did not, in fact, appear in the Bible. Instead of demanding a recount, Mr. Deronda accepted his wife's findings, the more readily as he had privately consulted the curate of the local church. The curate did not understand about concordances, but, being a professional, he did not need to consult one; he knew off-hand that "Edith" was a pre-Raphaelite sort of name and would not occur in the Bible. "I must have been thinking of Hester," said Mr. Deronda; then, blocking the curate's questions about when he might expect to see him in church (Mr. Deronda had been to church once that year, to get married, and he regarded purposeless churchgoing as overdoing things) he walked home as his custom was, to save the fare.

Mrs. Deronda's views on the relative positions of the sexes remained unchanged, but the fact remained that she now adopted the name "Martha" instead of "Edith," and from that day forth her marriage appeared to lose some of its magic. It always remained stable and happy, but she could not quite forget, or assimilate, the fact that Mr. Deronda had wanted to choose a name which he mistakenly thought was in the Bible. In after years she would sometimes muse on this event and its probable significance in the life story of their son Samuel. This person was conceived within a week or so after the Edith episode, and Mrs. Deronda could never entirely avoid the feeling that his backward and unpleasant physique, not to speak of his unfortunate character, might in some way be traceable to the change in his parents' relationship which resulted from it. Being a decent woman, she did not allow herself to spend too much time in thinking about such matters, and consoled herself by saying, in a quiet voice, "What's done

cannot be undone," several times a day during Samuel's childhood, usually just after catching sight of him.

To catch sight of Samuel Deronda was, indeed, at no time a refreshing experience. He had a glassy stare which, however often you encountered it, never failed to be disconcerting; and however charitably you decided to overlook the physical handicaps which an offended Nature had so liberally showered upon him, it was hard to feel any outflowing of human warmth towards a child so obviously self-sufficient.

Yet Samuel Deronda was, in his way, a happy child. Life made few demands on him, and he made almost none in return. To piece out a tranquil existence between home and school, avoiding with equal assiduity both the rewards and the punishments which fell to the lot of his more strenuous fellows, was all his equable nature required. For Samuel was a philosophical little fellow. He was content to take what came his way, allowing events to make their own pace, and never indulging in futile attempts to alter the pattern of his existence. Once he had grown to a sufficient height and weight to be able to inflict punishment when the fancy took him, on smaller children, his modest emotional requirements were met; and, though he was fully nine years old before he dared risk an encounter with a boy of five, he waited, with characteristic patience, and the years soon passed. It was the same with his intellectual attainments. The first page of his reading-book did not begin to make sense to Samuel until his glassy stare had rested on it for some five years; eventually, soon after his thirteenth birthday, the occult symbols began to relate themselves to sounds, and it was discovered that he could read. About the same time, the first page of his arithmetic book, too, began slowly yielding to the second. At the end of his statutory period of education, he could write simple sentences in a round, easily decipherable hand, add and subtract rather large sums, and—on his day—make a fair show at multiplication and division. These accomplishments were the gift which the English people, in their far-sightedness and public spirit, made to Samuel; forced on him, indeed, since he had at no time expressed any wish to learn them. We have called him a philosophical boy; he was more; he was profoundly compliant and

amenable; his vitreous stare expressed, if it expressed anything, a wish to avoid offending or being offended.

Samuel's adaptability went further. His parents indicated that he had now to go to work, and to work he went. A position was found for him as an office-boy in a firm that made saucepans, or gramophone pick-ups, or tomato sauce, or something of the kind; Samuel was never sure, but in any case, as he would retort if questioned by Jesse Deronda or Martha, (née Jessie) Deronda, "It don't matter—I work, they pay me, right? Do the tea, sweep the place out, jussa same whatever they're making, right? Don't matter." Jesse Deronda was satisfied with this further proof of his son's philosophic calm; but Martha Deronda, beneath her veneer of loyal acquiescence in this satisfaction, sometimes worried in private. She was not the first mother to find out that it is disconcerting to have a philosopher in the family.

After a few years, Samuel was doing more in the office than doing the tea and sweeping the place. At eighteen, he presented himself for a medical examination, but the unanimous verdict of the doctors present was that the rigours of army life, even in peacetime, would place an undue strain on his constitution, and he was rejected. This placed him professionally, in a fortunate position. His employers did not have to feel that he would leave them for many months and come back having forgotten all he knew about the business. He was there; he would be staying there; he had better be given something to do. At the beginning of his nineteenth year, Samuel's future seemed rosy and peaceful. He had ceased to be an office boy. Someone else did the tea and swept the place. Samuel was a junior clerk.

Happy is the country, and still more happy the individual, that has no history. Samuel had now been begotten, born, educated, and settled in life. Unless he wished to go in for a spot of begetting himself, he had nothing further to do except die, and even this could reasonably be put off for more than forty years. But it was exactly this begetting business that now stepped in and threw the boy's blameless existence into a hurricane of confusion. He wished—to be precise—to beget with the wrong person. Instead of finding, as he might reasonably have expected, that his lightly

flitting fancy had come to rest on some easily attainable blossom, it was Samuel's lot to stand helplessly by and watch it settle on a flower that grew half-way down a precipice. To abandon metaphor, he fell in love with the office beauty.

This was a vivacious girl from the Rayner's Lane district named Minnie Stroney. She had red hair and looked agreeably healthy, and she worked in the accounting department. Whether the nature of her work had some kind of spiritual effect on Minnie it is impossible to establish, but true it is that she saw life in a very accounting sort of way. Everything, to her, was profit and loss. Her red hair was profit, since it was not carrotty but red-gold; her good (though rather spreading) physique was profit; the solid social background of Rayner's Lane was profit. As for Samuel Deronda, he was loss. She made him feel it, and in case this was not sufficient she stated it explicitly. "You're a dead loss," she told him.

Samuel's philosophical temperament might have carried him over this handicap, and enabled him to settle down patiently to a long and uphill courtship, save for one very unfortunate factor. This was the courtship of Dennis, who was profit. Dennis was a well-muscled young man who worked in the packing department, or the canning department, or something of the kind, but whose work took him frequently into Accounting. No one knew whether Dennis was Dennis's Christian name or his surname, but this peculiarity only served to increase his prestige; it was as if, like Aragon, he was so important that he could get along with only one name. If he had spelt his name "Denis," or even "Denys," this would have failed of the proper effect; but "Dennis" was exactly right; and even Samuel, who still had a certain amount of difficulty in reading, knew that this was how he spelt it, for he had come across a note that Dennis had written to Minnie Stroney, and found it signed, in a bold and masculine hand, "Dennis."

The situation seemed hopeless. But love makes heroes of the least heroic of men, and this, be it marked, is a success story. Dennis, muscles and all, surname-like Christian name and all, bold handwriting and all, must be ousted. Minnie Stroney should be Samuel's, and his alone. This burning resolve occupied all the available space in Samuel's mind as he walked homeward one

evening, and paused, from force of habit, before his favorite news-stand.

What Samuel was looking for on the news-stand was simply his usual bi-weekly purchase, a small but thick newspaper whose function was to bring to its readers, 104 times a year, the same pieces of urgently important news, *viz.*, that the female human body is marked off from the male by certain differences in shape. His eyes wandered slowly, as usual, over the newspapers and magazines offered for sale; but this time he hardly saw them. His physical sight was well-nigh obliterated by the desperate clarity of his inner vision. There sat Minnie Stroney, at her desk, nylons crossed, nails polished, red-gold hair gleaming like a squirrel's tail in the fluorescent lighting; as lovely as, if a trifle more spreading than, the unbraced Amazon who stared, astonished to find herself caught under the studio lamps, on the front page of the bi-weekly. And there stood Dennis in his T-shirt, with his little moustache and Tony Curtis haircut. Flushing hectically, Samuel Deronda relived the latest of his long series of humiliations at the hands of Dennis. He had been, that very lunch-time, waiting outside the office to see if Minnie came out alone; if she had, he would have invited her to accompany him to the milk-bar where he took his lunch, his reasoning being that she had to get herself some lunch anyway, and she might as well do so where he could see her—for Samuel was a careful spender. Hardly had he established himself, however, when Dennis had lounged splendidly out of the Packing Department and across the road. "On patrol, Buster?" he had asked with a sniggering laugh. "Waiting it out, eh?" Samuel did not like the way Dennis always hailed him as "Buster," a form of address he had picked up from the cinema. But before he could reply, Dennis had entered the building, to reappear shortly with Minnie on his arm. On seeing Samuel there, he had burst into a loud and insolent laugh. "That's raight, mai man," he had said, "keep your ai on the orfis whaile we're aout. So long, sucker," he had added in his normal voice. Meanwhile Minnie Stroney had stared straight ahead, affecting not to see Samuel.

Power! That was what Samuel Deronda hungered for. He did not mind what form it took, but power he must have, power of the

kind that would compel Minnie to respect him. It could be physical strength, such as Dennis possessed; or wealth, as enjoyed by Mr. Vincent, the managing director; or fame, as typified by, say, Gilbert Harding. Any form would do; but power, power! Come quickly and save Samuel from despair.

"'Ere y'are, mate," the newsvendor was saying impatiently, holding out the bi-weekly dose of sex-obsession. "Wassa matta?" he cried, when Samuel took no notice. "'Ere, you wanna git yersoaf seen to! Yer woolgevverin'! Wikey, wikey!" he shouted. A small crowd began to collect.

Crimson, Samuel fumbled for his coppers as reality flooded back upon him.

"Cor crickey!" the newsvendor cried. "Asleep on 'is flippin' feet, no flippin' erra'. 'Ere, mate," he added, leaning forward, "I'll tell yer what *you* want. You want oner these 'ere!"

With a sweeping gesture, he picked up a small magazine, one of a tiny, neglected stack at the rear of his stand. Playing to the now spellbound gallery, he held it up prominently.

"Poetry!" he shouted. "Abaut your cuppa Rosie, I should say!"

The bystanders giggled. His mind labouring, Samuel slowly worked towards an understanding of the position. He was being insulted. The man was pretending to offer him a magazine of poetry because he seemed daft. It was like Dennis over again.

Then it occurred to him that the tables might still be turned. Scowling, he waved aside the bi-weekly newspaper. He could always get it somewhere else, and the female form was unlikely to change overnight. Instead, he took the poetry magazine out of the man's hand.

"Ecktually," he said, "I'll *have* this. I been looking for a copy all over London."

He seized the magazine; it was like grasping a nettle.

"Got something of mine in, I believe," he said casually.

"Blimey, I guessed right," said the newsvendor. He passed his hand over his forehead and pretended to stagger. "A poetry writer! No wanna 'e don't take no notice wha'ya say to 'im!"

The bystanders glanced at Samuel curiously, as if expecting him to burst into song or fall down in a fit. Unexpectedly, this did not

embarrass him; it was even rather pleasant, for once, not to be overlooked.

"How much is it?" he asked loftily.

"Reminded. Fruppence," said the news vendor, stacking the bi-weekly back into its place. If he could not sell one, he would sell the other.

Samuel walked away with the magazine sticking out of his pocket. Though, as we have seen, a careful youth, he considered threepence a not excessive sum to pay for his dignity; besides, he rather liked the way they looked at him.

* * *

Like his father, Samuel was in the habit of walking home to save the fare, and, as he now threaded his way through the less-crowded streets, he began to look round for a dustbin into which he might throw the poetry magazine. If there had been one handy, this history would end here, with Samuel still hopelessly outpointed in his bout with Dennis. But it was hard just to throw the magazine down in the street; unlike a crumpled newspaper, it did not look the kind of thing one would want to toss away from one while walking along. Someone might even pick it up and come running after him with it; in which case he would be branded as daft.

In any case, he had paid threepence, which was as much as his bus fare would have been. Was it conceivable that the magazine offered anything approaching three pennyworth of diversion? Would he, in other words, be justified in taking the step of actually opening the magazine and beginning to read it?

Halting, he opened it. He was confronted by a page with the word POEM in capitals at the top. That was all right. Then he began to spell out the words which occupied the rest of the page.

The first two lines ran:

Anyone's seawhorl nowhere in the forever darkness
Me appoint towns upward the meanwhile terrible.

Samuel rubbed his eyes. The word "poetry" had previously held a simple, if vague, meaning for him. It had been a matter of

Ti tum ti tum ti tum ti tum
Ti tum ti tum ti tum.

As far as the subject-matter had been concerned, it had mainly meant flowers, deeds of violence on bridges, and similar topics. One of the teachers at his school had once explained to the class that poets were very important people. Why, Samuel had not quite grasped; but evidently it was regarded as an important activity to write about flowers, or deeds of violence on bridges, in a *tum ti tum* way.

Poets. Important. Important. Poets.

What dogrose spiralling in the otherwise innocent
Bullrushing day's eye?

Samuel stood still, thinking. He had seen a film, not long previously, in which one of the actors played the part of a poet. He had worn a large tie, and odd clothes generally, and spoken in a way that, without being able to analyse it, Samuel had recognized as being distinctive. The other characters in the film had taken this man with an inexplicable seriousness. They had, it is true, patronised him, but they had not neglected him or treated him harshly. It was impossible, Samuel realized as he looked back on this film, to imagine Dennis going up to this character and calling him Buster and making him feel inferior. Any such attempt would have made Dennis himself look a fool; the aura that surrounded the poet had been such as to protect him from that kind of attention. At the time, Samuel had not thought much about the matter, but he thought about it now. It suddenly seemed to have become a matter of personal concern to him.

He turned the page. Here was another poem, written, it seemed, by someone else. It did not seem much different from the first one he had read.

My guilty tripod, like an earthquake spout
Stomachs the grassblood and the ears of light,
Till seaweed fries.

The main trick seemed to be to mention the sea as often as possible; apart from that, all you had to do was keep it moving in a mist of images. Samuel could not, of course, have put it like that; any more than he could have described, in terms of essential literary history, the precise point at which he dipped his egg-

cup into the stream of English poetry; these are for his intellectual betters to speculate on. This, meanwhile, is a success story.

A thin man in a pin-striped suit ran into Samuel from behind, sending him lurching against a lamp-post.

"Mind where yer ruddy well going!" he expostulated.

"Watcher loiterin' for then?" the clerk retorted. "Standin' there day-dreaming, watcher expect?"

"Day-dreaming yer ruddy self," Samuel returned with dignity. "I was just 'avin' a read." He held up the magazine so that the pin-striped man could see its title. "It was so interessin' I couldn't wait till I got 'ome."

The pin-striped man was about to pass on without comment when the title of the magazine, which included the word "poetry," caught his eye. Immediately he shot Samuel a look of real hatred.

"Wastin' yer own flippin' time and everyone else's," he snarled in a new voice, thin and cold with hostility. "Standin' about doin' nothin'. Throwing yer flippin' time away."

Again the immediate reaction! And not merely immediate, but strong! Once again Samuel was faced with a situation he could not analyse, but which he recognized as a strong one. He could not know, for instance, that his interlocutor was employed by the Inland Revenue, and that some of the hatred felt by that institution for the artist, of whatsoever kind, had, as it were, brushed on to him as he sat at his desk. The word "poetry" called up, for this man, a mental vision of the kind of person to whom he and his kind had vowed never to show quarter. By standing still in the street, the better to scan a magazine of poetry, Samuel had annoyed this official much as if he had spat on him.

This, in his own way, was power. The newsvendor staggering, the income tax clerk glaring with venom: it was hard to think of any other pose, so easily assumed, that brought one so immediately to the forefront of people's consciousness. He looked at the man almost gratefully, and without prolonging the squabble, passed on.

That evening, after supper, Samuel sat by his open window, his wishes spiralling upwards in the summer air. The magazine lay open across his knee. The minutes, the hours, passed. Then waver-

ingly, he reached out for a pad of lined letter-paper, which he kept for writing to Minnie on, though he had not yet thought of anything sufficiently effective to write to her. In a trance, staring as if hypnotised, he took out a chewed pencil and began to write, slowly and carefully. After ten minutes the top sheet of the pad was covered with a mess of words resembling the mess of words on the page of the magazine before him. One was elegantly printed, the other was crudely scrawled in pencil; but both were equal in the sight of the literary nurseries. They were *poems*.

Ten evenings later Samuel was again sitting at his open window, and again the summer night was the recipient of his confidences. But this time it was not the magazine that lay open on his knee. It was a typewritten letter. "We have much pleasure in accepting," *etc.* It had begun already. Samuel was an accredited, about-to-be-published poet. He was one of the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

"I must say I do like a fellow to be a bit out of the ordinary," said Minnie Stroney. She and Samuel were sitting together in a milk-bar and he was showing her his copy of the poetry magazine and his letter of acceptance from the editor. "It's nice for people to be different instead of bein the same," she explained.

"Thass what I think," said Samuel. He seized his advantage. "Couse, it's no good going in for *this* stuff"—he indicated the magazine—"unless you are different. Poets, not the same as ordinary fellows."

At the word "ordinary," as if on cue, Dennis entered the milk-bar. He looked healthy and aggressive. He had evidently just been to the hairdresser and his Tony Curtis hair-cut, which of late had been getting ragged, was newly restored to its neat effectiveness.

"Been lookin for you, Beautiful," he said to Minnie. He leaned against the counter in between Samuel and Minnie, with his back to Samuel; in this way he was able to get between them although they were sitting on adjacent stools.

Ordinarily, Minnie would have switched her attention to Dennis, and ignored Samuel from that minute. But now she appeared irresolute. Dennis was attractive to her, undeniably so, but it was

also true that Samuel had produced a remarkable new card. She had never before met anyone who read poetry, let alone wrote it. She supposed that was why Samuel had always been so quiet. He was brooding inwardly, experiencing the power of his own imagination. She looked at him over Dennis's head and he once more seized his chance.

"Takes a bit of doing, netcherly," he said. "Can't get the hang of it all at once."

"Studied a long time, I suppose?" Minnie asked, still over the head of Dennis.

"Years," said Samuel briefly, "Never away from it, for years. Why I never had much time frenny social life, sorta thing." Dennis swivelled round.

"Gorblimey, it's Rocky Marciano," he said. He put out a hand and pretended to feel Samuel's biceps. "What's this about studying, Buster? Watcha been studying? Tell papa."

"I don't think it'd intress you," said Samuel with dignity, getting down from his stool. "Not much in your line, I specked. We was talking about poetry."

He expected Dennis to burst into a roar of malicious laughter, but Dennis did nothing of the sort. Instead he began to look very nasty and threatening.

"Oh, poertry, eh?" he said, putting his hands on his hips. "It's like that, is it?"

"Like what?" said Samuel, genuinely bewildered.

"Tell me it isn't true, Baby," said Dennis to Minnie. "Tell me he's not telling the truth."

"Dunno what you mean," she said, tossing her head and turning her profile to him. "Samuel's just showing me a magazine that they're going to print one of his poems in, that's all."

"One of his *poems*?" Dennis asked, very slowly and with hatred. "Print one of his **POEMS**?"

He rounded on Samuel, "What you been telling her?" he asked like a policeman.

Samuel began to understand. He had been doing some more thinking in the last ten days and he remembered that poets were supposed to be gay, roistering blades, fatally attractive to women.

This was not a conspicuous part of the legend that surrounded his new *métier*, but it was the part that had attracted the attention of Dennis, in whose mind Samuel now figured, evidently as an expert seducer and no fit companion for Minnie Stroney.

"Been writin' poems, have you?" he continued, very fiercely.

"You got no call to get excited," Samuel countered, measuring the distance to the door with a quick glance.

Suddenly Dennis relaxed; his face creased into its usual good-humoured sneer.

"Pretty smart, kid," he said, clapping Samuel on the shoulder. "You had me believein' y'at first." Smiling round at Minnie, he took up the magazine, which was lying on the counter. "Poetry, eh?" he grinned. Holding it close to his eyes, he began an exaggerated pretence of scanning every word on the cover.

"Don't see your name anywhere," he said to Samuel in feigned surprise.

"Next issue," said Samuel briefly. He could see that his idyll was in ruins, for one morning at least, but a new aggressiveness made him want to stay, instead of slinking away as he had been used to doing; at least he could pester Dennis so that neither of them would win the round.

Dennis laughed loudly, "Oh, next issue, eh?" he shouted jovially.

"Lemme know when it comes out. I'll buy it outa me old age pension."

"It comes out every three months," Samuel muttered, but he knew that this was too lame to be an effective *riposte*. He was simply playing into Dennis's hands. At any moment he would call him "Buster."

Suddenly a fountain of rage flowed upwards in Samuel's heart. He had stood about enough of this. He had the editor's letter, but he knew Dennis would only say he had forged it, especially as it was on ordinary paper with no printed address. There was only one immediate way out.

"I gotter telephone call I gotter make," he said, slipping down from his stool. Dennis immediately sat on it, and he saw with a fresh upsurge of rage that Minnie seemed preparing to give Dennis

her full attention. "I'll be back," he said, scowling, "as soon as I finish me call."

"Don't hurry," said Dennis. "There's some poems wrote up on the wall of the phone box," he added. "You can fill the time in gettin' a basin fuller them."

Samuel held the magazine clutched in his hand. The number of the editor's telephone was not given; he got it from "Enquiries" and dialled it at furious speed. The editor's name was Randolph Seed. He could hear the office telephone ringing, and almost at once it was lifted up, but no one spoke.

Samuel waited, afraid to speak first. He could hear the other person breathing. Silently he stared down at the mouthpiece.

Then the thought of Dennis assailed him, and on a wave of hatred he said, "Is Mr. Sneed there?"

"This is Mr. Sneed's secretary speaking," came an indistinct voice. Samuel could not decide whether it was a man imitating a woman, or a woman imitating a man.

"I'm Deronda," he brought out, struggling against his mounting sense of unreality.

"You're what?"

"Not what. Who."

"Who what?"

Samuel laid down the receiver and wiped his palms. Why couldn't the fellow employ a secretary who had a voice like a human being and understood normal speech? Picking up the instrument again, he said weakly. "My name is Deronda—Samuel Deronda. You accepted a poem of mine the other week. You remember—you must remember—it was called "Poem." Sent me a letter about it 'n all," he cried.

The voice at the other end now underwent a change. It dropped several tones and seemed to become more relaxed, as if its owner had decided that there was nothing to be afraid of.

"Ah! a contributor. Of course, of course. What would you like me to do for you?"

Samuel had not rehearsed this well enough. Faced with the crucial moment at the conversation, his nerve failed him. If he pestered this person, whoever it was, the result would never be

published at all. He panicked. "Your—your voice has changed," he said accusingly.

A laugh came along the wire. "Well, what of it? *Give every man his voice*—that's the motto of the magazine. You've seen it on the cover, Mr. Slazenger."

"Deronda," Samuel shouted. He felt very near to tears.

"Listen, come to the party," said the voice, giving way now to fatigue and boredom. "Come to the office party tomorrow night. You'll meet all the other poets there. Believe, me their names are just as damned silly as yours."

Samuel opened his mouth to shout, "Silly yourself!" Then in time, he realized what the man had said. Gratitude and joy flooded his being. Still shouting, out of sheer nervousness, he began to bellow his thanks. "I'll bring Minnie," he said, really to himself, but still hooting into the telephone.

"Bring who the hell you like," said the voice. He heard the receiver being hung up.

Samuel bounded back into the milk-bar. Dennis and Minnie were sitting on the adjacent stools, heads bowed, knees pressed together. She was reading his hand.

"You haven't half got a nice life-line," she was saying.

"I'll throw it to you," Dennis purred. He was enjoying his moment of supremacy. Samuel sneered at the back of his neck then stood on tiptoe and looked Minnie straight in the eye as she raised her head.

"S'pose you're doing something tomorra night, Minnie?" he said casually.

Dennis twisted round. "Yes, Jack, she's doing something. And the next night, and the one after that."

Samuel recognized that "Jack" was the next stage after "Buster." This, he realized with an unwonted shrewdness, was an advance.

"Pity," he said, still addressing Minnie. "I had an invitation for yew."

Dennis laughed nastily. "Invitation what for? Walk along the sider the canal and eat three penn'orth of potater crisps? Be your age, Jack." He turned away again.

"It was to a party," said Samuel, still paying no attention to

Dennis, "A little party. Famous writers. Meet all the slebritties."

Dennis, maddened, twisted round again. "Ere," he said. "What you talkin' about? Slebritties? What kinder slebritties?"

"You woudnavurd ovvem," said Samuel. "Outer your line. Writers. Famous poets," he added.

"Famous flippin' jackrabbits!" Dennis shouted. "Famous ruddy me Aunt Fanny!"

Samuel glanced across at Minnie. In her face he read his victory. Silently, he watched her get down from her stool.

"As it actually *heppens*," she said witheringly. "I'm entirely free tomorrow night. I'll be glad to come along, Samuel, and thanks."

"Pick you up at sem-thirty," said Samuel quickly. He stood by to let her go out, then backed away from Dennis. Once outside, he broke into a run.

* * *

"I'm better known by my pen-name of course," said the leathery-faced fat man. Samuel shifted uneasily on his feet. Where was Minnie? They had been here for hours, and he had hardly spoken to her. He tried to search for her out of the corner of his eye, but the leathery-faced fat man, whose discourse was entering its second hour, kept a keen look-out for signs of inattention.

"I write under the name of Henry Gibson," he said. "You see why, don't you?"

"Nice name," Samuel stammered. "Take you long to think it up?" he asked in a burst of inspiration. "Whatcher do, look through the telephone book?"

The leathery-faced man stared at him reproachfully. "You mean to say you don't cotton on?" he asked mournfully. "Haven't you realized that that's how BBC announcers always pronounce 'Henrick Ibsen'?"

A tall young man in a plastic raincoat now joined them. Samuel wondered why he did not find this garment too hot in the crowded, sweltering room. He seemed quite cool, however, and asked Samuel his name.

"Then when my book is published," the leather-face went on, "all the people who hear it mentioned over the air—"

"Deronda? One of Randolph's would-be contributors?"

"Not would-be," said Samuel with an air of pride. "I have accepted. Had a letter'n all."

The man in the plastic raincoat began to laugh delightedly.

"Had a letter, have you?" he guffawed. "Here, Len, did you hear that?"

"I'd rather you called me Henry," grumbled the leather-faced man. "I was just explaining to this chap—"

"Yes, but don't you see the joke," cried the tall man, wiping his eyes on his plastic sleeve and getting ready to laugh again. "This chap's fallen for Ran's gag!"

Len, *alias* Henry Gibson, stared at him fixedly. "You don't mean the letter gag? About accepting his poem?"

The other, unable to speak, nodded in delight.

Samuel looked round wildly. What were they saying? And where was Minnie?

But here she was, coming across the room to him. And the man holding on to her shoulder was Randolph Seed, the editor.

With laughter exploding round him, Samuel faced his matador.

Randolph Seed came across the room with his arm around Minnie's waist. He ignored Samuel and spoke to the leather-faced man who called himself Henry Gibson.

"I've got a candidate for the job, Len," he said. "This lady tells me she's fond of reading."

"Fond of reading *good* books, I said," Minnie put in demurely. "They have to be good books, to intress me . . . you know, *serious*."

She looked round for approbation, but not, Samuel noticed, to him.

"You don't have to worry," Randolph Seed assured her. He had taken his arm from round her waist, but he now held her hand, as if absentmindedly. "Len only does good books. He's a top-notch."

"What job's this you're offering her?" demanded the man in the plastic raincoat. He began eyeing Henry Gibson suspiciously, and Samuel noticed for the first time the narrowness of his eyes in that ferrety face. "You're up to the old snyopsis game, are you?" he went on in an unpleasant harsh voice.

"Yes, Mr. Gibson, what would my duties be?" Minnie asked

eagerly. She was thoroughly enjoying the evening; the agreeable sensation of finding herself at the centre of a knot of males, while familiar enough to her in Rayner's Lane, seemed more heady than ever in strange surroundings. I assume the job's only part-time," she continued.

"Just secretarial duties," said Henry Gibson quickly, trying to turn away. "Get in touch with me later," he added. But the man in the plastic raincoat would not let him sidle out of the conversation. Under the amused eye of Randolph Seed, he gripped Henry Gibson's shoulder and continued his questioning.

"It is, isn't it, Len? It's the old synopsis game you're on isn't it?"

When Henry Gibson did not answer, he turned to Minnie. "I'll tell you what your duties'll be," he said venomously. "Len reviews novels. At any rate that's his story. He's had a regular berth reviewing novels every week for twenty years, and in all that time he hasn't read one of them to the end. If you take the job, he'll get you to read novels for him, six or eight every week, and give him a note of the plots. That's how he saves himself from silly mistakes when he writes his review."

"So what?" Henry Gibson demanded, flushing dully. "The people that wrote the novels mostly bought their plots from other people before they wrote them up, anyway."

"So this," grated the man in the plastic raincoat. "You slammed my novel without even looking up your notes right. I could see, even if no one else could, that your secretary had slipped up or else you had. You thought it was about the Australian bush."

Henry Gibson groaned wildly. "Are we going to have all that again?" he demanded. "That was six years ago, Norm. You know I've always said I'll make it up when you do another. You can write it up yourself and I'll sign it. Provided I get the money for it, of course," he added.

"To hell with it!" Norm shouted. "You know I'll never do another. Nobody'd publish it after what you and your gang said about the last one."

Minnie had been listening interestedly. If Norm thought that he was going to diminish Henry Gibson's credit by revealing his strategy as a novel-reviewer, he had miscalculated badly. Minnie

was eager to begin her work, which sounded refreshingly easy. She was fond of recounting, at length, the plots of films she had seen, and this would be like doing the same thing and getting paid for it. Besides, these people were so wonderfully interesting.

Samuel, too, was looking at Henry Gibson with increased respect. At heart a sound business man, he was beginning to realize that this racket had possibilities. If people wrote novels for which they paid other people to think up plots, and others in turn reviewed these novels while paying still others to do the actual reading for them, it began to look as if he had strayed into a world where nobody ever did anything at first hand. And this was the kind of world for which Samuel's temperament best fitted him.

But where did Seed fit in? What was his racket?

"Mr. Seed," he jerked out nervously, plucking at the editor's sleeve. "I was wondering . . . phew domine me asking. . ."

"Later, friend, later," said Seed absently. He was still holding Minnie's hand, and seemed to be working out how best to get her away from the others. "Don't you find it very hot in here?" Samuel heard him asking. "Perfectly boiling," she agreed.

Samuel turned away, only to find that Norm, the man in the plastic raincoat, was sneering down at him, his eyes full of pitying contempt.

"What was it you were going to ask Ran?" he probed.

Samuel was going to make an evasive reply, but it struck him that there was no harm in being frank for once. "I was just trina get a date out of him."

"Make a date with him, you mean?"

"No, a publication date, see? Ask him when he thought of printing my poem."

Norm laughed nastily. He looked around to see if there was anyone standing near by that could share the joke with him. But Samuel was on his mettle and determined not to give Norm this satisfaction again.

"Yes, you've 'ad one laugh over it," he said, flushing over the dropped aspirate and resolving inwardly to put in some practice on his diction. "You and that geezer with a face like a dart-

board. But you never got round to tellin' me what you was laughing at."

For answer, Norm laughed again, but so artificially that it carried no conviction at all. This round was Samuel's, and they both knew it. Norm looked savagely at him.

"I'll tell you what I was laughing at, little man," he said curtly, not smiling. "Randolph Seed never rejects a poem. Every poem that comes in to him he accepts."

"What for?" Samuel asked, his voice harsh and urgent. He was in it now, and he must find out the secrets of this world as soon as possible.

Norm tried to laugh again, but this time the artificiality was really grotesque. It was obvious that the subject was in reality a very painful one to him. "What for?" he demanded, gesturing. "Why the hell do you think anyone would buy his lousy magazine if he didn't? Whereas if there's a permanent nucleus of 500 people who are buying every issue because they hope to see their pathetic little poems in it—well that's business."

"But how long does it take them before they start askin' what he's up to?" he said.

"Oh, they're always asking," said Norm bitterly. "They come round to the office. They write him. They ring him up. That's why he disguises his voice over the telephone. He's trying to make you think he's a woman, so that he can say he's his secretary and that he's out."

This sentence was lacking in clarity, but Samuel saw the drift. He looked at Norm shrewdly.

"And if they get too troublesome, he asks 'em to parties?"

"You're learning, boy," said Norm heavily. "You'll see it all if you just hang about and keep your eyes open. And mind you, I don't say they all have to wait for nothing. Some of them actually *do* get their poems published. After all, if a chap who's been writing poems for years, and never had one published yet suddenly sees himself in print, what's the first thing he does?"

"Get drunk?" asked Samuel vaguely.

"Yes, but *before* that," Norm said earnestly, leaning forward. "He goes out and buys twenty-five copies of the magazine to give

his friends. People will do *anything* for a bit of prestige—that's the first thing to learn in this racket. Money's nothing to it. Just give 'em a chance to impress their friends a bit. Why is Seed a big shot in his lousy way? Because he grasped that fact. Why is that illiterate swine Len able to make a living, and not put behind bars where he ought to be? Because his job consists of trading in people's self-esteem. He doesn't bother to read those books he reviews, or to think about them at all, for that matter. He just hangs about the right pubs and the right flats, keeping his ears clean, finding out who's due to be praised and who's due to be kicked. Gawd, it's a lovely caper!" he finished, his voice sharp with envy. Samuel looked at him curiously.

"Watcher tellin' me all this for?" he asked.

The pitying contempt came back into Norm's eyes. He glared at Samuel.

"Because, you poor little cheesemite," he grated, "I'm too tenderhearted to watch you getting caught up in it. Here you are, just another sucker, anxious to gain a bit of credit in whatever smelly little *milieu* you come from, and full of pathetic little ambitions that play you straight into the hands of scum like Seed. And I can't bear to watch it."

The words fell on Samuel like lashes. Norm had sized him up so mercilessly and so rightly. Dennis had his number at home, Norm had it here. Was there nothing he could do to make a little progress?

Norm turned away. The guests had been moving off while they talked, and now only half a dozen people were left in the dingy office. Might as well pack up and go home, Samuel thought helplessly. This is just one more thing that's no good any more.

Turning, he found Randolph Seed at his elbow. The editor was actually about to address him, and for an instant hope flickered in Samuel's heart.

"Yes, there you are, friend," Seed purred. "I just wanted to say don't bother about the girl-friend. I'll be seeing her home."

"Where is she?" Samuel asked dully.

"Outside in the street. I'm taking her home in a taxi."

"In a taxi? To Rayner's Lane?"

Seed grinned, the office light flashing off one gold canine. "Not to her home. To mine."

Abruptly, Samuel turned away. Let them have her. Let them have everything. He felt like a man who has challenged a syndicate of card-sharpers to a game of poker in a train. But suddenly he thought of Minnie, and how much he wanted her, and how equally much he didn't want Dennis, or Randolph Seed, or Len, to have her. His jaw stiffened. The pride of the Derondas, so long dormant, was stirring.

No one was watching him. He side-stepped back into the office. Everyone else had drifted on to the landing. There was a small space behind a metal filing cabinet, big enough for him to squeeze into and be hidden. He dived for it.

"Everyone out?" said Randolph Seed. "Where's Antirrhium, or whatever his name is? Gone out, I suppose. Well, that's everybody."

He switched the light off. Samuel, alone in the darkened office, heard him go down the stairs and out. Through the open window came his voice, saying something to Minnie, and her answering squeal of laughter. A taxi drove up, purred, banged its door, and drove off.

Still Samuel waited. He wanted to make quite sure of not being disturbed. He had a plan.

Although the office had been empty and silent for ten minutes, Samuel still froze, breathing quietly, behind the filing cabinet. Nothing must go wrong. He would not begin to move, much less switch on the light, until it was certain that no stray guest would come back to redeem hat, gloves or handbag.

A neighbouring clock struck eleven. The party had ended rather early, owing, no doubt, to Randolph Seed's designs on Minnie. At last Samuel moved. Going over to the office desk, he took the reading lamp and put it on the floor. He switched it on, getting a subdued light which would not attract attention from the street. Moving methodically, he began rifling the desk, taking out papers and holding them at knee-level so as to read them by the lamp on the floor.

Samuel's plan was simple. Randolph Seed had accepted his poem and he was going to print it. This feeble chicanery about

accepting everything and printing virtually nothing might work with callow youths from the universities, but Samuel was really in business, really on the way up. He was bent on playing the racket as it should be played. In his pocket was a typewritten copy of his poem. He had overheard Norm saying that the next issue of the magazine was already compiled and ready to go to the printer. It would be the work of a moment to substitute his own poem for someone else's—remembering, of course, to amend the table of contents.

What was this? A bulky envelope not sealed. Working fast, Samuel shook out the contents: different-sized sheets of paper, covered with handwriting in different styles, all recognisably feminine. He turned them over. Letters from girls, evidently—Randolph Seed's equivalent of a Leporello album. He put them back into the envelope, folded it carefully and put it into his pocket. Samuel knew, without needing to be told, that many a literary career has jumped a rung or two by blackmail.

Another bulky envelope. At last! Here it was! The top sheet was the table of contents—Volume 8, No. 3—all in order. The second sheet was the editorial. "Only by poetry can the individual soul be saved from the blight of our age," it began. He thought of Randolph Seed disguising his voice over the telephone, of ferret-eyed Norm in his plastic raincoat.

Samuel laid the stack of typewritten sheets down on the floor and quickly leafed through them. Hello, here was a poem by Norm. It was called "Ode to Incest." He had not caught Norm's surname, but he had heard him say to Randolph Seed, "What about my ode?" and Seed had answered, "It's in this number." Samuel grinned to himself, looking diabolic in the light striking upwards on his face. Norm had been offensively patronising only half an hour ago, calling him, Samuel, a "cheesemite." He looked at the poem, which began:

O thundering blubber-encompassed ultimate singing lingam.
Good stuff. Norm had hit off the group style very well. All the better to disappoint him with! Samuel grinned again as he crumpled Norm's ode, slipped it into his pocket and substituted his own poem, "Poem."

What was this in the same envelope? The draft of a handbill, evidently advertising a poetry reading to come off in a week's time. "Among the poets who have consented to read their work are. . . ." Without hesitation, Samuel crossed out the first name on the list and substituted his own. He would turn up ready to read his poems, and they could hardly refuse to let him when his name was on the handbill. At this rate, fame would be his in a few weeks. And then Minnie could hardly . . . *what was that?*

Footsteps were coming loudly and quickly up the stairs—a bulky man, nervously hurrying. Samuel clicked off the lamp. There was no time to put it back on the desk or to shut the drawer—or to do anything but dive for his hiding-place.

He dived. The door opened on an apparently empty office.

* * *

The summer moon shone brightly on Rayner's Lane. In that law-abiding district, stronghold of the British virtues, most people were asleep; downstairs, in their impeccably furnished living-rooms, which they called lounges, the chromium-plated clocks showed eleven-thirty. But one solitary figure was not asleep. Standing outside a trim semi-detached, it shifted irritably from one foot to the other, casting frequent glances along the road in either direction. An onlooker, had there been one, would have found the moonlight bright enough to reveal that this figure was stockily built and had a Tony Curtis haircut.

Dennis was tired of being given the qualified run-around by Minnie Stroney. A direct-minded young man, scorning *nuances*, he had evolved a simple plan: to wait until Samuel brought Minnie home, no matter how long it took, and then pounce on him, beat the daylight out of him, and tax Minnie directly to say which of them she preferred. Dennis reasoned that she could hardly say she preferred Samuel when Samuel was in ignominious flight or stretched prostrate on the pavement. Parties and celebrities, no parties and celebrities, muscle was bound to prevail.

He waited, flexing his muscles. Now and then he jerked his kneecaps backwards and forwards to make sure his legs would be

flexible when it came to the battle. He did this from force of habit, not because he was in any doubt of the outcome.

Traffic had almost died out, so that the sound of a taxi droning towards him caused Dennis to back into the shadows. Taxi, eh? Trying to impress the girl, was he? Because if so. . .

The taxi really did contain Minnie. It stopped and she got out. With her was a man Dennis had not seen before, but whom he was nevertheless prepared to dislike. Dennis promptly focused on this newcomer the accumulated annoyance he had been feeling for Samuel Deronda, plus a top-dressing of annoyance which he had earned for himself by a number of means—upsetting Dennis's plans; bringing Minnie home; bringing Minnie home in a taxi; bringing Minnie home in a taxi late at night; *kissing Minnie!* That settled it.

Stepping forward, Dennis gripped Randolph Seed by the shoulder. "That's the wrong lipstick you're using, Bud," he said. Like all Dennis's epigrams, this came from the cinema; but all present felt that it was strikingly fresh and appropriate to the situation, perhaps because the bright moonlight imparted a touch of the cinematic to the whole scene.

Randolph Seed tried to think of a rejoinder, but before he could say anything, Dennis had given him a very smart one-two the wrong way round, *i.e.*, a right to the chin followed instantly by a left to the solar plexus. Minnie squealed. This evening had altogether been too much for her.

"Dennis! Dennis! Stop it!" she shrieked.

"Try that for size, Jack," Dennis gasped as his fist thudded into Randolph Seed's midriff.

"Police! Teddy boys!" shouted Minnie's father, Mr. Stroney, from his bedroom window.

Only Randolph Seed was silent. He was thinking that the office party had not, after all, been a success.

* * *

Samuel had cramp. For several minutes he had squeezed himself back in his cranny behind the filing cabinet and he had not moved a muscle. He was also puzzled. The person who had come

in, whoever it was, did not seem to be there with any definite purpose in mind. A tramp coming in out of the cold? No, obviously; the tread had been too assured. It was someone who knew there would be no one to challenge him, and could probably give a plausible reason for being there in any case. One of Seed's creditors, searching the place for money? But the man wasn't searching; he was simply sitting there. Samuel heard the rasp of a match and smelt its phosphorescent tang and then the less acrid drift of tobacco smoke. What was the fellow sitting there for? He longed to peer out, but did not dare. For all he knew he would come face to face with the man. It was better to hang on. His shoulders hurt and one of his legs was trembling. This was terrible: what if the man simply stayed all night? He did not seem to—Samuel jumped, his tense muscles out of control, as the telephone shrilled.

Before it had had time to complete the first ring, the unseen man had it to his ear. "Seed," he said quietly. But not in Seed's voice.

"Yes," he said, and hearing the voice for the second time Samuel was able to identify it. He shivered with pure surprise. Henry Gibson! Hadn't the geezer got a telephone at home?

"I've already explained that," Henry Gibson was saying. "This is the safest time for me to use my office phone. And I don't want any more argument. We've gone into it already. I estimate that there'll be six hundred quid in that safe. I want a hundred of it before I part with the combination."

"No, no, damn it," he said irritably. "I've told you, the money's only there for one night. They fetch it from the bank on Thursday night and use it to pay the wages on Friday. There never has been anyone in the building and there won't be this time. Unless I have your agreement immediately I shall ring right off. It's far too dangerous for me to be here—at any moment Seed might come back for something. I said I might be seen coming back or something. That's the matter, can't you hear?" He was breathing heavily.

"Right, that's the idea," he said after another pause. "I'll be in the refreshment room on Platform 1 of Paddington Station on Tuesday night, nine-thirty. Whoever you send is going to slip me

an envelope—and see that it's there. Then I shall hand him my envelope. It will contain the combination number and the dope about how to get in and so forth. Right?"

"No, I blasted well won't. What do you expect me to do, wear a chrysanthemum? Or shall I carry a yachting cap in my hand? The sort of thing that'll get me stared at by everybody in the place, and my face remembered? Not on your life. I'll be carrying a copy of the paper. It's a Sunday paper so there won't be anyone else carrying one on a week-night. Now I'm ringing off. And you can think yourself lucky I've worked it all out so neatly. If you make a mess of your end of it, don't go bringing me in. I shall have an alibi anyway. I shan't come and visit you in prison. I shan't even write to you. I'll be in Cannes, spending my hundred pounds."

Samuel heard the receiver laid down. Excited to recklessness, he thrust his head out. That thick-set figure, disappearing out of the door, was recognisable even from behind. It was Len all right, alias Henry Gibson.

Just for good measure, Samuel stayed in his cranny for another two minutes. In the meantime he thought patronisingly about Henry Gibson. What a mistake the man had made. Didn't he find his novel-reviewing profitable enough?

Perhaps, he reflected, it was the cost of paying someone to read the books for him. That sort of thing would be bound to send up a man's overheads. Now if *he* were a novel-reviewer, he wouldn't bother about reading them at all, by proxy or otherwise. It ought to be easy enough to get by without even seeing the books, for that matter. It would just be a question of . . .

Forgetting his cramp, he came out of his hiding-place and was halfway down the stairs before he even remembered that his joints hurt. If he were a novel-reviewer! But why the *if*? One plain-clothes policeman in the refreshment room at Paddington Station—Platform 1—and there was going to be a vacancy on a good-class Sunday paper.

He hurried, exulting, along the moonlit pavement. The future looked good.

The proprietor of a respectable and intellectual Sunday newspaper has to be a judge of men. But as Samuel sat opposite this

particular Proprietor, and looked at him glassily across the mahogany desk, the air was heavy with bewilderment.

Neither of them could size the other up. The Proprietor was unable to square Samuel's habitual hang-dog manner and flaccid resistance to conversation with his proven resourcefulness and public spirit. After all, Samuel *had* proved correct, and had led to appropriate steps within the domain of criminal law. Len would not be reviewing any novels for some years. These things were accomplished facts, and—here the Proprietor passed his hand over his eyes—it was Samuel who had accomplished them.

Samuel, for his part, could not understand why the Proprietor was so long in coming to the point. After all, it was—surely?—conventional, to say the least, that anyone who had rendered a service to a rich and powerful man should be asked, with a fair amount of dispatch, some pleasing question on the lines of, "Is there any little favour I can do for you?" the Proprietor unexpectedly asked, leaning forward. He took off his pince-nez and began swinging it gently to and fro as if wishing to send Samuel into an hypnotic trance.

"Yerss, mattrafack there is," said Samuel immediately. "He worked for you, Len, didney?—doin' the books."

"Well, no, as a matter of fact I don't think he was in the accounts department," said the Proprietor, watching Samuel narrowly, but unable to forecast what he would say next. "He was something to do with the literary side of the paper—he reviewed novels."

"Swot I said, din I?" Samuel countered aggressively. "Doin' the books. Reviewing," he said slowly and pityingly, as if realising that the Proprietor would have no chance of following the argument unless it was conducted in a stylised jargon.

The Proprietor sank back in his chair. "About this favour I could do you," he said in the tone of one changing the subject. Samuel cut in briskly.

"Len's dropped out, right? Job's vacant, right?"

Their eyes met. Suddenly the air was cleared of bewilderment. Two men of power had recognized one another. This, after all (the Proprietor reflected) was how he himself had come up; the hard

way. A bell was rung, a message was given, hands were shaken, corridors traversed, and Samuel found himself facing the Literary Editor.

This functionary showed no surprise. "Going to do the novels? Well, I hope we shan't have to correct your spelling as much as we did Len's. I'll send the first batch round next week, if you'll leave your address!" He turned away.

Samuel lingered, hoping for a word of guidance. "Never done this caper before," he volunteered.

The Literary Editor nodded towards a small inner room. "We've got the walls lined with all our back numbers there," he said. "Take a look through that lot. You'll soon get the hang of it." He went back to his work.

* * *

"When Mr. Vacuum produced *Ferrets in Torchlight*, that pres-tidigitative first novel, I was—I confess it freely—taken in. Eminent-ly readable, the book had all the appearance of a carapaced talent which should rival the whorled shards of Tallulah Peeble herself, and perhaps even turn out to be a legitimate successor—in trousers—of Mrs. Woolf. But—I confess it expensively—the appearance of his new novel, *Mating Porcupines*, had disabused me."

Samuel's eye raced down the column, picking out the key words. "Characters distressingly insubstantial . . . little need be said of . . . can hardly be expected to enter upon a discussion . . . all in all, disappointing. . . ." Yes, it seemed pretty routine stuff. Difficult to see why Len had needed anybody to provide plot-synopses for this. "It may be of course," the review ended, on a charmingly self-deprecatory note, "that I was unfair to Mr. Vacuum; I came to him straight from a reading of Sebastian Scabies."

The last sentence was obviously a get-out formula: it combined a graceful compliment to this Scabies character with a possible loophole in case Mr. Vacuum should ever become important and have to be flattered. And it gave a charming note of "We're all human and fallible together, especially me." Although Samuel was not reading for enjoyment, but simply to learn the technique of the job, he permitted himself a smile. The thing was so fool-proof; it

reduced the performance of a difficult art to a few simple rules of thumb. Working quickly, he picked up the pile of back-numbers and glanced through a number of Len's reviews in quick succession. All the unfavorable ones, he noticed, had that formula. "I may have been to Miss Burnt-Norton; perhaps it was a mistake to read Mr. Ashe-Wednesday immediately before." "But after all, my failure to respond to Mr. Hardy may be simply that he is overshadowed by Miss Laurel." One even said memorably: "I made the mistake of coming to this book immediately after reading Flaubert." Samuel wondered where Len had heard, or seen, this queer foreign name; but he was acute enough to see that it must be a powerful talisman. Flaubert; remember that.

The favorable reviews were even easier to imitate. Samuel went through a round dozen of them, noting down the key phrases. Then he laid the pile of back-numbers aside. His professional training was over.

"Going already?" the Literary Editor asked, as Samuel passed through the outer office.

"Gossome writin' to do," Samuel answered. He wrinkled his brow, indicating gravity in the face of a difficult task, then suddenly decided to abandon the pose. He could perfectly well relax, after all; the fellow had been *ordered* to give him the job.

"Goin' to get on with the reviewin'," he said, leering.

"But you haven't got the—" said the Literary Editor. He was going to finish the words, "books yet," but closed his mouth. He nodded, his face expressionless. Samuel went out.

"Lucy!" the Literary Editor called. "Lucy."

His secretary, a fat girl, came into the room. She moved as if the air surrounding her had the consistency of water, thrusting herself along with vigorous movements of the shoulders and arms.

"You saw that man just went out?" the Literary Editor asked.

"Yes," said Lucy.

"Shall I tell you something?"

"Yes."

"He's taking over Len's berth."

"Yes?"

"Shall I tell you something else?"

"Yes."

"I think I'm going to like him," said the Literary Editor.

* * *

"Tops for devourability," Samuel wrote. "A sensitive reaffirmation of human values, this book is wholesome as butterscotch. To his earlier pertinacity and sensitivity, Mr..... has added a new catholicity of range. This book made me curl up like a roll of linoleum. Absorbing as blottingpaper, with a plot that runs like a gazelle, it lives in every line. I cannot resist quoting one of the many memorable passages it contains."

"Need I add that this book has an essential *niche* in the luggage of everyone contemplating a journey by space-rocket?"

Beginning a new paragraph, he went on more slowly, lingering with pleasure over his phrases—or rather, over Len's phrases, or rather still, over Len's pickings from the phrases of his predecessors.

"Mr....., on the other hand, has produced an offering that could only be used as ballast. Expectations whetted by, falteringly sustained by....., are doomed to extinction when this volume reaches the bookstores, if it ever does. Can Mr..... really expect us to swallow the blurred and perfunctory sketches of, his hero, or, his equally unlikely heroine? And what does he expect us to make of passages such as the following?"

Again he left a blank of some inches.

"In conclusion, one can only beg Mr..... to return to whatever his occupation may have been. The English novel needs him like a hole in the gall-bladder. But perhaps, after all, it was a mistake to come to him fresh from a rereading of the Abbe Prevost."

That would do. As a top-ranker he would only be expected to deal with two novels at once; the rest would be dealt with in huge batches by the hacks who, presumably, had even less competence and discrimination than Len. Still, he reflected, there was no hurry. He had been round to the factory and given his notice (now he never *would* know what it was they were supposed to be making), and there was nothing to do until that evening, when he had arranged to conduct Minnie to the poetry reading.

Samuel paced his room, thinking. Was the poetry racket still worth playing after all? His only motive for going into it in the first place had been to make himself appear interesting in Minnie's eyes; wouldn't the novel-reviewing be enough on its own, especially as it brought him in a living wage on which he could even ask Minnie to marry him? He took out his poem, "Poem," and looked at it. Was there really any need to go on with this stuff?

But the caution of the Derondas asserted itself once more. Why not have two strings to his bow? "Mr. Samuel Deronda, poet and critic," sounded better than "the well-known novel-reviewer, Mr. Deronda." Even Len, he recalled, had at any rate had the astuteness to *talk* about a book he claimed to be writing, the one he was going to sell to all the people who confused him with Henrik Ibsen. With a shudder, he recalled that Len had even out-lined the subject-matter of his book to him when they had met at Randolph Seed's party. It was to prove that Shakespeare had written the works of Bacon. Wincing, he recalled the diabolic persistence with which Len had droned on, claiming to have proved that if you took the first line of Bacon's first essay (in the edition of 1602, the second of the second, the third of the third and so on, and picked out the first letter of the first line, the second of the second, and so on, you got the reading "EGO GULIELMUS SHAKS-PEAR HOC FICI"; or some such rubbish. Samuel's head hurt as he thought how Len had bored him, but all the same he recognized a lesson that had to be learnt. Even Len, who had seemed so secure, had found it necessary to have another imposture in reserve. And poetry was easier than stewing over a lot of old books, or pretending to stew over them.

Well, but it was important to have first things first. This novel-reviewing needed a little more attention before he could write any more poems. He must build up a good back-log of reviews, so that he could have a long time, say six months, of idleness in which to consider his strategy. When the books arrived, he need only spend a few minutes copying out the names and quotations into blanks left for the purpose, and his duties would be over. The rest of his time he could devote to faking up more "poems" and pressing

his suit to Minnie Stroney. Life's problems dissolved before Samuel's eyes; the way ahead was clear.

Edith, nee Jessie, Deronda now called up the stairs, "Samuell Your dad wants to know why you don't come down. Your 'addock's getting cold."

Immediately, Samuel laid aside his pencil and stood up. "Never did care for cold 'addock," he remarked to himself, moving towards the door. The sound practical sense of the Derondas was evident, as much in small things as in great. Samuel felt he had earned a good strong cup of Rosie and a nice warm haddock. Such a meal, he knew, would constitute a sensitive reaffirmation of human values.

* * *

"It's you next, Samuel," Minnie whispered, squirming on her already creaking chair. She was terribly excited. The Poetry Reading had been organised by one of those high-pressure literary impresarios about whom the one inexplicable thing is that they did not go into show business. The cramped, stifling room had echoed to the ululations of some of the best performers who were ever lost to the music-hall stage.

The performer on the stage was just finishing. In spite of urgent time-signals, he calmly unfolded and read nine poems instead of the agreed three. He now took out a tenth, "to conclude with, if I may," and launched into it; but Samuel could see from the size of the paper—a single sheet—that it could not be a long one.

A shaft of evening sunlight fell on the reciting man. He swayed hypnotically backwards and forward, his voice a dead monotone. Samuel listened carefully, noting the run of the lines and the construction of the phrases. All he had to do was to assimilate two styles—Len's and this—and his future as an English Man of Letters was assured.

"Drowned among the bread men, rolled in a ringing rowlock," the "poet" chanted. Samuel listened reverentially. This was classy stuff, classier than his own, even. He could not have put it into literary terms—could not have explained, for instance, that the recipe was to begin with a splinter of Dylan Thomas's sensibility and then whittle that splinter down to nothing. But he knew what

counted in the world he was breaking into, and he knew he could do it, and he knew that Minnie had fallen, and that she was, at last, his worshipper.

The "poet" stepped back from the golden shaft. The organizer ushered Samuel to the platform. Samuel was introduced, standing impassive, the newest luminary. "Has also undertaken the fiction reviewing for the Sunday *Enclosure*." He stepped forward and favoured the company with his poem, "Poem," then modestly quitted the platform. His modesty was remarked upon. It was not traced to the fact that "Poem" was the only poem he had so far written.

And there let us leave him, stepping down from the platform, confident, young, vitreous and already famous, beginning to taste the rewards that Poesy will yet scatter bountifully upon those who doughtily serve her. You and I, reader, will slip away, noting with a final glance that Samuel (the interval being upon us) is walking across the room to Minnie, his own true love. She rises, aglow, to meet him . . . but no: he has halted. His eye has been caught by a melting glance from a swelling siren in a swirling dirndl. Samuel pauses. He looks from the newcomer to Minnie Stroney, and back again. His mind—we read it—is made up. He crosses the floor towards his New-Foundland. The game goes on.

Gilbert Sorrentino

A TRANSLATION FROM THE OLD SPANISH ROMANCES

Romance del Prisionero

When all through this month of May
the heat is visible, is haze,
When the lark chants sweet,
the nightingale returns her lays,
When dazeeyed lovers
grovel before love—
Still, I, wretched, pallid,
live, in this dark hovel:
Nor know when days, nor know
when nights are shoveled into time:
Save that ...some tiny bird
once squeaked the dawn into my cell—
Till that BASTARD of a jailer killed her:
God crown his head in hell!



Por el mes era de mayo quando haze la calor,
quando canta la calandrina y responde el ruysenor,
quando los enamorados van a servir al amor,
sino yo triste, cuytado, que vivo en estra prision,
que ni se quando es de dia, ni quando las noches son,
sino por una avezilla que me cantaba al albor:
matómela un balletero; dele Dios mal galardón!

Donald Pearce

YEATS AND THE ROMANTICS

Minor poets peddle trends and zeitgeists; major poets perform operations on them, and create new ones. Altering and rectifying the basic sensibility of a culture is what the major poet does for a living. In the case of a minor writer, an Arthur Clough, or a Francis Thompson, the question, "How was he influenced by the earlier romantics?"—*i.e.*, in what ways did he keep on doing the same things they had done? or, whom did he borrow the most from?—makes gentle sense; but to ask about the relation of a poet of the stature of Yeats to nineteenth-century romantic tradition means, or ought to mean, something quite different, *viz.*: *What did he do to it?* The answer is: he overhauled and rectified it.

Overhauling romanticism was only one of several *ad hoc* tasks which Yeats performed en route to bigger objectives. But there is no better way of indicating the weight of his impact, the sheer *scope* of his undertakings as literary conscience, than by isolating the key problem which the earlier romantics had inherited, and with codicils bequeathed, and observing how Yeats coped with it.

Essentially, Yeats "rescued" the romantic movement in English poetry by extricating its vernal impulse, the Creative Imagination, from the hands of Nature's Priests, and rendering it once more the agency of an intellectual vision that could not only take but scorn the light of common day. To explicate this feat as thoroughly as it deserves could very well engage us in a detailed review of the fortunes of European philosophy from the Greeks to Coleridge; in which perspective, the romantic *agon* would appear as a late and fevered episode in the whole tragic story. Thus, "placing" the romantic episode in a sentence: after the normative occidental world-view articulated in the fifth century by Saint Augustine had been dissipated by Renaissance skepticism and seventeenth-century scientism, European Philosophy was seduced

by the new Physics in a power-marriage that ended almost at once in an epistemological divorce of the Object from the knowing Subject; and that radically split-world, the intellectual hand-me-down of Descartes, Locke and the machine psychologists, formed the romantic milieu—Colosseum rather, in which Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats fought with metaphysical monsters more terrible than Flavius's wolves and half-starved lions. The complete history of that phenomenon is now so well known that we can safely assume it, and simply cut into the story just prior to the romantic insurgence, at a point that will enable us to observe some final provocations.

For the purpose, Joseph Addison comes neatly to hand. Writing on "The Pleasures of the Imagination" in *The Spectator* for Tuesday, June 24, 1712, Addison enlarges on "that great modern discovery, which is at present universally acknowledged by all the inquirers into natural philosophy: namely, that light and colors, as apprehended by the imagination, are only ideas in the mind, and not qualities that have any existence in matter," and urges his reader to consult "the eighth chapter of the second book of Mr. Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*." He continues, a little cowed but genially: "Things would make but a poor appearance to the eye, if we saw them only in their proper figures. . . . We are everywhere entertained with pleasing shows and apparitions, we discover imaginary glories in the heavens, and on the earth. . . . But what a rough unsightly sketch of nature should we be entertained with, did all her colouring disappear, and the several distinctions of light and shade vanish." Then in one of those prophetic thrusts which bind century to century, agon to agon:

In short, our souls are at present delightfully lost and bewildered in a pleasing delusion, and *we walk about like the enchanted hero of a romance, who sees beautiful castles, woods, and meadows: and at the same time hears the warbling of birds and the purlings of streams; but upon the finishing of some secret spell, the fantastic scene breaks up, and the disconsolate knight finds himself in a barren heath, or in a solitary desert.* It is not impossible that something like this, . . . (italics mine)

What Addison here momentarily pre-visioned ultimately came to pass. One hundred and seven years later, Locke's primary and

secondary qualities have "finished the secret spell," the disenchant-
ed knight did indeed awake "haggard and woe-begone"

and found me here
On the cold hillside.

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering
Though the sedge is withered from the lake
And no birds sing...¹

The three dots with which Keats ends this famous ballad are, one can't help surmizing, practically a tip to take the whole thing as an obsessed circular reverie, almost a "round"—the knight endlessly questioning and answering his own image in the lake (of his will). The impression of schizophrenia is enhanced by the dual context of dying nature and nostalgic mediaevalism in which the knight is placed, amply suggesting a remote, lost integration. In any case, Keats's knight-at-arms—sword, shield, and armour on—standing dazed and missionless among the withered lakeshore sedge, perfectly images the complex disjunction of objectivity and subjectivity, agency and motive, nature and the human spirit, that by the middle of the eighteenth century had split the western world-view apart. The sutures of machine psychology, by which Hartley and Priestly had sought to unite the human brain to the engine of Newtonian physics, hadn't held and the breach between the "inanimate cold world" of Science and the living world of the human spirit continued to widen. Emanuel Kant, awakened by Hume from Newtonian sleep, made a fretful attack on the problem: "If we drop our subjective condition, the object... is nowhere to be found because its form, as phenomenal appearance, is determined by those very subjective conditions..."; but in the end came out by the Newtonian door where in he went, to reaffirm the received dualism in a mammoth distinction between *Reason* (the world of sensible intuition: order of nature: matter) and *Understanding* (the world of a priori categories: order of morality:

¹As Addison's image of the knight on the barren heath realizes itself in Keats's poem, his image of the knight in the solitary desert is realized in Shelley's *Ozymandias*—among the great prophetic poems in the language, with Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* one of the cleverest previsions of *The Wasteland*.

mind). Formal philosophy herewith gave up the attempt to bridge the gulf now fixed between Nature and Mind; and in turning away, left the youthful poets of the romantic movement facing the cardinal intellectual problem to come out of the Renaissance. No generation of poets before or since has had to face more; and no one who even partly grasps what was at stake—man's place in the universe—can look on their work without excitement and something like terror. For they ran a bridge across that awful gap all right. Only it was a bridge of San Luis Rey.

THE IMPULSE FROM THE VERNAL WOOD

The root problem which the romantics faced was how to repair, in terms which the spirit could approve, the seventeenth century's divorce of Nature and Mind. They had been handed a bifurcated world; they continued to think in predominately dualistic terms. The attack was, accordingly, from two sides: a public doctrine proclaiming an ethical and spiritual order of nature (mainly Wordsworth) and an esoteric doctrine of the Creative Imagination as copula between outer nature and the human spirit (mainly Coleridge).

The first of these doctrines, made of green wood, warped under their hands and ultimately came apart. Travellers on that side of the bridge fell singing into the abyss. It is important to see why and how. The job to hand was to reinform external Nature with the values of which she had been emptied by Newtonian physics and Lockean psychology. The method chosen—emotional counter-affirmation—was as unconsidered as it was simple-minded: a hooked marlin will put on much the same display, which does not in the least negate the fact that it has been hooked. Trees, cataracts, groves, winds, the seasons, were proclaimed teeming with "influences," "presences," "a something deeply interfused," that supplied the human spirit with intuitions of higher morality, discipline, and love. In his heyday Wordsworth even declared, in the teeth of the Newtonian mechanics, and snapping his fingers at School ethics:

One impulse from a vernal wood
Can teach you more of man

Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can.

later rephrasing, in more august tonalities:

... well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thought, the nurse
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Under correction from the subtler Coleridge, Wordsworth at length came round to see that the Order of Nature is not *per se* ethical, but only as it combines with creative human intellect which projects meaning into it. But with his investment so high in the former stock, he had little left to put on the latter; and as Coleridge's profounder thought lacked adequate—in many cases, any—circulation, the inheritance of the later romantics was pretty much early Wordsworth.

THOSE DYING GENERATIONS

Shelley begins with close Wordsworthian affinities. Highest on his list of auctorial credentials is the fact that "I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes and the sea, and the solitude of forests. . . . I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc. . . . I have sailed down mighty rivers and seen the sun rise and set. . . ." Transposed to the C-sharp minor of neo-Platonism this theme becomes Shelley's all-pervading Spirit of Nature that draws man's mind through beauty and fellowship with The One.

This Shelley affirmed with lyric force and immense difficulty. Take *Mont Blanc*, in essence a wall-sized print of Wordsworth's vernal quatrain. The picture thus blown up, however, what Shelley found was a double exposure: the universe of Spirit superimposed on the universe of Physics. Or was it vice versa? Which was "real"? The split remained. Throughout his short life Shelley struggled with this problem a dozen ways but could never solve it. Toward the end his fine, tormented mind became a veritable teeter totter, now up vitalism, now up scientism, now up the choruses of Aeschylus, now up Cartesian geometry, now up metaphysics, now up me-

chanics. There was, alas, no escape from that awful playground so long as the supervisor of activities remained John Locke, whose credentials Shelley never, unfortunately, examined.

With Byron the nexus between Man and Nature comes down to emotion. By and large, it is a straight case of Rousseauian empathy: the splendid wildness of Nature is answered by free-ranging passions in Man. Vernal wood, Ocean, Jungfrau, one after the other announce in P-A tones that institutional man is corrupt, civilization a sham. Nevertheless, with Byron something new has been added. Alone among the romantics he preserved a thin thread of connection with the Augustan urbanities—specifically with Pope's civic conscience—on the other side of the Romantic storm center. The storm had done its work and Byron's mind was muddled and confused; but there remains, under the clangour, a minimal preception of the difference between the organism of nature and the artifice of civilization—ruined as a perception, be it added, by his petulant refusal to endow the civic term of the relation with decent value. His nature-worship was, in fact, little more than a detour around "the City"; his role of professional tourist guide only a handy disguise snatched up by a guilty fugitive from the idea of civilization.

With Keats a different equation is presented: the brief "sole self" *vs.* the deathless song of the bird. Nature is set still farther off from man—not melodramatically as in Byron, nor platonically as in Shelley, nor psychologically as in Coleridge, but existentially—Man is mortal, while "The poetry of earth is ceasing never." John Keats spent most of his life in the dark grove of the nightingale listening to its intolerable homily. But on one occasion he broke free and heard the cold rectifying music of the Urn, and the equation altered: not mere Man *vs.* sheer Nature any more, but the informed eloquence of Art *vs.* Nature's accidental harmonies. And in such juxtaposition the Urn of art outsang the Darwinian Bird. Keats, it is true, couldn't stay with the perception, and in the end the bird sang him to death. But for the moment Nature had been put in her place, and quite in the way Coleridge had said she should, though had not himself been able to accomplish: for had not the intellectual master of romanticism once defined

the human Imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am," and poetry itself as a subordinate logos"?

The Ode on a Grecian Urn, as hymn to human Artifice, modified in time poetic sensibility in England. Rossetti, Watts-Dunton, Morris, Pater, all belong within its quiet orbit. Within it, too, fall the closing pages of Pater's *Renaissance*, in which the esthetic of the Urn is transposed to a *modus vivendi* that, retransposed in the heroic mind of Yeats, brought the Keatsean brief clarity to Byzantine permanence. Keats's cold urn was Byzantium seen far off, and as it were, hopelessly. It was further limited as an icon of the Imagination by its ability to participate only in the order of eternity, but not in that of time. Yeats's Byzantium expands the Keatsean urn to the dimensions of a domed city, able to include a dedicated human citizenry, and at the same time "all heavenly glory" to symbolize.

THAT SENSUAL MUSIC

We are not here playing at robbing the early romantics to pay Yeats. We are attempting to highlight their artistic and philosophical dilemma in such a way as should most clearly reveal the exact solutions worked out a century later in the poetry of Yeats. To this end it will be serviceable now to examine in succession Shelley's skylark, Keats's nightingale and Yeats's bird of golden handiwork. There are more than ornithological differences at issue.

The peg from which *To a Skylark* hangs is "What is man compared unto thee?"—a particular case of Wordsworth's wisdom-of-nature that puts to shame the petty faculties of man. The lark is seen as naturalistic miracle. Its song, not being toiled-over construction but a *spontaneous event*, nullifies comparable works of human artifice. What deprives us of the passionate creativity of the lark, which if a poet could only tap he could astonish the world with "harmonious madness," is the fact that we are reflective beings; from which curse the bird is free, hence its song is pure—not just unself-conscious "making," but *unconscious creation itself*. We begin to reach the crux of this poem and to discern its relations to precedent and subsequent romantic tradition.

As parabolic statement about artistic creation, "harmonious madness" means simply a transcending "downward" and "outward" from art to automatism. (*The Defence of Poetry* underscores the point: "Poetry, as has been said, differs in this respect from logic, that it is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind.") *To a Skylark* belongs, in fact, near the head of a one-hundred-year old esthetic line that descends with increasing apparency from the romantics, through Poe, Swinburne, Carroll, to the Dadaists and Surrealists. André Breton's definition of surrealism—"verbal automatism; thought's dictation; the activity of the mind in the immediate process of thought"—is an approximate gloss of Shelley's explicit theme.²

Again, by easy transposition we can see the *Skylark* as a (crypto-) hymn to the pre-reflective state of childhood; as such it swings by a visible thread from Shelley's favorite Wordsworth poem: *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*. In that ode Wordsworth heaps massive ethical and philosophical compliments (burdens) on the head of the Child: "best philosopher! eye among the blind . . . mighty Prophet! . . . glorious in the might of heaven-born freedom" (all the things, by the way, Shelley attributes to the lark), contrasting infancy's "clouds of glory" with the dull prison house of maturity, where one's vision "fades into the light of common day." This perverse equation (Childhood=wisdom, freedom, the fullness of nature; Adulthood=blindness, incapacity, decay) persistently obsessed the romantic poets, and we may diagnose it as a projection of their central guilt: the failure to locate Value in the responsible human mind, rather than in hills, valleys, birds, stars, the passions, the bowels, where they did locate it: the failure to unite private wisdom and public action: the detailed refusal to hear, let alone create, the moral and civic music of adulthood. Hence child cult, bird cult, flower cult—they are all interchangeable—anything but maturity cult.

"The style is the thought." The romantic misplacement of

²It is not hard to spot throughout Shelley images and landscapes resembling scenes by Salvador Dali; not frivolous to note that Shelley's vision of a woman who had eyes in her breasts instead of nipples is of a piece with the imagination that conceived "Autumnal Cannibalism."

philosophic *value* had direct rhetorical consequences. The kite-in-a-high-wind quality of Shelley's poetry, once regarded as a manifestation of accomplished lyricism, was in fact, the distress-signal of the romantic movement. The private shiver of delight properly betokened loss of community, imagination set over against reality *Rhetoric* splitting off from *Grammar*. Shelley's symbolic lark—as best philosopher, creative unconscious, unschooled artificer, archetypal poet—was a trembling focus of romantic hysteria, romanticism fluttering against its own image in the mirror. We can leave the lark thus occupied, while we discover what its nocturnal counterpart, Keats's nightingale, is doing.

We find him in a lush natural setting: moonlit woods, "shadows numberless," the "embalming" aroma of flowers. Thus enshrined, the bird "pours forth" its matchless paean to summer. The human listener, aching at the sound and what it tells him—*viz.* that between the brief fever of human life and the eternal artistry of Nature there lies a gulf past all bridging—longs to die on the spot. The indifferent bird then flies away to repeat its perfectly random song "in the next valley glades."

Keats is not here manipulating a simple ontological confrontation of the human and the natural orders. The foreground of the poem is definitely taken up with something else. Bird, as Voice of the beauty of Nature par excellence, and listener, as romantic poet, are set in direct competition *as artists*; and the bird wins the contest with ease. (The opening words of the poem strategically prepare us for the defeat: all the pathos is with the drugged poet, all the *élan* is with the bird.)

There is an odor not just of violets and eglantine in the poem, but of profound dissatisfaction and guilt. Drugs are referred to; an obsessive longing to escape (from what?) haunts each stanza; death lurks and beckons. One would like to detect unconscious irony in the phrase "melodious *plot*." Which one well might, for that drug that has been taken (likened to Hemlock, the traditional drink of the condemned) and which the suffering listener has received *via* the ear, in the form of Bird Song, is in reality none other than the "impulse from the vernal wood" *become Logos*. We recall that in Mediaeval religious paintings, a streak of light from star

to ear signified symbolic impregnation of the listening mind by the heavenly Logos. In the lush grove of the Nightingale, the natural theology of romanticism reached corresponding dark fulfillment. Wordsworth's penchant for finding

In Nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thought, the nurse
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
of all my moral being

had indeed come home to roost, as a feathered epitome of "merciless beautie." Intelligible nature, no longer the nutritive order of the given, had at last become the glamorous and tyrannical Cartesian Other.

According to legend, the nightingale sings because a thorn is pressed against its heart. Keats here reverses the myth: the nightingale's song becomes the thorn against the poet's heart. Hence the "terms of capitulation" in the poem, conceding with such wearied completeness the Carteseo-Lockean split between Nature and Mind. Keats adopts not only the position but the very terminology of Locke, admitting sadly that "the Fancy cannot cheat so well as she is famed to do, deceiving Elf." Here, if anywhere, is an ironic circle: Romantic creative Imagination, in revolt originally against Newton's mechanical universe and Locke's depreciated Fancy, had gradually conjured up a living world of Nature in defiance of the "inanimate cold world" of Science—only to end, abashed by the splendours of its creation, admitting the enemy's case against creative faculty itself. From Scorerer to Apprentice.

ONCE OUT OF NATURE

It was against the above romantic dementia that Yeats directed his famous reply, driving syllable by syllable into the Keatsean requiem:

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
What ever is begotten, born and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Momuments of unageing intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
 For every tatter in its mortal dress,
 Nor is there singing school but studying
 Monuments of its own magnificence;
 And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
 To the holy city of Byzantium.

O sages standing in God's holy fire
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take
 My bodily form from any natural thing,
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

The *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Sailing to Byzantium* together constitute a single score in counterpoint, dovetailing so neatly as to justify our finding in this a principle of the latter poem's composition. We are not in the presence of parody, but of the fusion of two intellectual lines to yield a *tertium quid*; and that third thing is an inclusive and self-transcending critique of the entire romantic movement *via* Keats as its quintessential voice. Music is our best analogy and counterpoint the technique employed. Thus: Keats's setting of the beech grove with its "shadows numberless" is countered in Yeats by Byzantium's laid-out gardens, where not a thing is admitted that has not been made by hand or ordered by human wit: Keats's cry for "a draught of vintage" that he may "fade . . . into the forest dim," by Yeats's cry for intellectual fire to come and scorch sick nature-longing out of him: Vague Flora and Hippocrene by austere sages and cunning Grecian craftsmen: Keats's nostalgic "emperor and clown"

(who only happen to overhear the nightingale in a break in the court revels) by Yeats's toiling Emperor, focus of a whole culture, who is kept awake and at his work by the persistent metal bird: "magic casements" by the mosaicked walls of mind-built Byzantium: "perilous seas" of fairyland, about which there was little anyone could tell Yeats, by the flat declaration that he "has sailed" them: Keats's forlorn "sole self" by Yeats's stately audience of "lords and ladies." The nightingale's "anthem" becomes a plaintive descant to the gold bird's philosophic song.

The detailed counterpoint is woven firmly about the fact that Keats's "immortal bird" is really a pathetic fallacy, a great many mortal nightingales having sung between the song "heard by emperor and clown" and the one Keats hears. Its immortality is a sentimental scientism, mere continuity of species only; its "ecstatic music literally a mating-song, prelude to the rearing of hungry generations of other little nightingales. One ought to remember, too, that when sharp-eared Elizabethans listened to nightingales they heard "jug, jug." Keats hears a flood of piercing melody because he is listening not to the actual sound, but to an idea about the sound: "Philomel, by the barbarous king so rudely forced." The appeal of the nightingale to the romantic generation, was in fact, bound up with their constant notion of themselves as singers spurred by bitter persecution, as, of course, in ways that we have already discussed, they truly were. Yeats, on the other hand, is perfectly aware that the only voice from "ancient days" that can be heard anymore is that of, say, Homer or Catullus, the voice that is, of art, the undeformable voice of poetry, where one responds to the thing itself, not to an idea of the thing heard in the mind before it is actually heard with the ears.

But the dying animal of romantic Nature had not been wholly sloughed off with the writing of *Sailing to Byzantium*. (Hence the participial form in the poem's title.) Four years later he was able to write its sequel, this time not from the point of view of one disembarking on the beach, but of one inhabiting the city itself:

The unpurged images of day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
After great cathedral gong;

A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
 All that man is,
 All mere complexities,
 The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
 Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
 For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
 May unwind the winding path;
 A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
 Breathless mouths may summon;
 I hail the superhuman;
 I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
 More miracle than bird or handiwork,
 Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
 And all complexities of mire or blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
 Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
 Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
 Where blood-begotten spirits come
 And all complexities of fury leave,
 Dying into a dance,
 An agony of trance,
 An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
 Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
 The golden smithies of the Emperor!
 Marbles of the dancing floor
 Break bitter furies of complexity,
 Those images that yet
 Fresh images beget,
 That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

This magnificent poem articulates so much in Yeats which lies outside our present purpose, that in focussing only on those aspects which explicitly counterpoint with Keats is to run real risk of distortion. We notice the time is midnight, the hour when Keats's distressed bird-watcher longed "to cease with no

pain." The hammered gold bird doesn't now merely disapprove of the anarchic dryad of the trees: it "scorns aloud/in glory of changeless metal/Common bird or petal," and defies the whole drugged tangle of the senses. Romanticism's built-in persecution-complex (the "forlorn sole self") is transcended, the poet becoming an intellectual flame in a dancing consort of flames, purged of "the fever and the fret" of an appetitive tradition. The sensuality of the shade with its wafted perfume is replaced by the bright dancing floor of art, set with tall marbles shaped by definitive acts of creative mind. The bell of the pulse tolling back to solitude and matter, is replaced by "great cathedral gong," clapping a curfew on all concupiscence and summoning who can to the rituals of the intellect. Instead of the naturalistic "Queen Moon," which only "haply" suffers Keats's scene, there looms the measured Byzantine dome, holding in fixed disdain the merelessness of all contingency and flux.

Under the song of both Keats's nightingale and Yeats's metal bird runs the sound of the sea, "gong-tormented" in Yeats, in Keats "perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn." The intense nostalgia of Keats's images makes us find in it the metaphysical pathos of his poem: In fairyland, naturalistic time is suspended, all accidents of nature are left behind; to sail there, *i.e.* to assert the supremacy of imagination and art over nature, "life," could mean only one thing, to break with Time-philosophy and Nature-worship: to undertake the romantic hemlock. Intellectually, this would have meant going behind deeply entrenched Carteseo-Lockean positions in epistemology, metaphysics and psychology, a task which Keats was certainly not equipped to perform. It is no wonder, then, that he designated those seas "perilous." Yet it is across those seas precisely that Yeats had sailed, to a mental city where "golden smithies" (take the phrase half slangily for "artists," "visionaries," "thinkers") have erected walls and bastions against which the "bitter furies" of the flux dash themselves in vain.

The terminal phrase in *Byzantium*, "gong-tormented sea," ("urn-tormented") plumbs the Keatsean anguish to its depth. To one entangled in "complexities of mire or blood" the gong of Art's timeless city can be the worst of torments: as who knew

better than Keats. Answering that gong a man will make a dolphin of his body and his personal life, plunge in and swim though salt blood blocks his eyes till he arrives at that formal city where nothing gets admitted that has not put the sea between it and the place "where men sit and hear each other groan."

TO THE HOLY CITY

Supernatural Byzantium, Art's intellectual city, where the incorruptible gold bird sings to entertain, instruct, prophecy, where no flux seethes, and all things have their right relation to the preoccupied Emperor in his garden: this was the true objective of the romantic movement in English poetry. That the first fleet of romantics failed to reach it is mainly attributable to the siren-song of nature-philosophy which lured them down fatal moral, philosophic and esthetic channels. But there was another cause of the failure: sheer scattering of intentions and energies. They never pulled their movement into conscious formation. Hailing-distance about describes the order of the fleet though often it was not even that, each clutching a different fraction of the sailing chart. Moreover, it was fundamentally a spasmodic effort. The Coleridge-Wordsworth team-up, after initial productive cohesion, fell apart and the "wide, wide sea" claimed them. The second group, Byron-Shelley-Keats, fared even worse: split off chronologically from their predecessors, and without cohesion among themselves (Keats was defensive and suspicious in Shelley's presence, Shelley rather repelled Byron, Byron scarcely knew Keats existed) they made no concerted attack on the immediate problems of sheer navigation. Though Shelley had periodic impulses to found a group, nothing materialized. Nobody said to anyone else "What are we doing? Where do we go from *here*?" They knew next to nothing of each other's discoveries or sufferings. Shelley's *Adonais*, for instance, describes Keats's death and achievement as something seen miles off through a spy-glass; his *Defense* was a desperate and elaborate communique aimed at no one in particular and barely overheard by anybody. Keats's fine letters—possibly the most important log-book of all—were directed at a few unimportant passengers. And rear-admiral Coleridge could find no more to

say after meeting Keats one day than "There is death in that hand." So naturally they did not reach Ithaca: they had no idea where it lay.

Which is precisely the subject of Yeats's *Coole Park, 1925*. In that rich poem Yeats attributes the success of his own "Irish movement" (admittedly he was the only one that greatly mattered, but they met as writers, planned, learned from each other) to the fact that they existed as a coherent, self-critical group, had "a scene well set," "excellent company" and "one woman's powerful character" that kept "half a dozen in formation there." At the same time he reveals, by infinitely graceful parody and innuendo, the true causes of the early romantics' failure.

He begins with the image of a swallow's flight (his own career)—the gregarious swallow set in instantaneous opposition to the wild, solitary skylark and nightingale. He then proceeds to open out implications, line by line working up his polar theme of collective achievement *vs.* scattered failure, group formation *vs.* the solo flight, "excellent company" (salon) *vs.* "all sensuality of the shade"), art *vs.* nature:

I meditate upon a swallow's flight,
Upon an aged woman and her house,
A sycamore and lime-tree lost in night
Although that western cloud is luminous,
Great works constructed there in nature's spite
For scholars and for poets after us,
Thoughts long knitted into a single thought,
A dance-like glory that those walls begot.

There Hyde before he had beaten into prose
That noble blade the Muses buckled on,
There one that ruffled in a manly pose
For all his timid heart, there that slow man,
That meditative man, John Synge, and those
Impetuous men, Shawe-Taylor and Hugh Lane
Found pride established in humility,
A scene well set and excellent company.

They came like swallows and like swallows went,
And yet a woman's powerful character
Could keep a swallow to its first intent;
And half a dozen in formation there,
That seemed to whirl upon a compass-point,

Found certainty upon the dreaming air,
The intellectual sweetness of those lines
That cut through time or cross it withershins.

Here, traveller, scholar, poet, take your stand
When all those rooms and passages are gone,
When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound
And saplings root among the broken stone,
And dedicate—eyes bent upon the ground,
Back turned upon the brightness of the sun
And all the sensuality of the shade—
A moment's memory to that laurelled head.

The reader should be aware of at least the following contrapuntal elements if he is to get this poem:

1. "constructed" (l. 5.); a building term, implying effort, apparatus, workers, plan; as opposed to the romantics' reliance on solitary inspiration.
2. "For scholars and for poets after us"; *i.e.* the enhancement and modification of tradition, as opposed to, say, Shelley's "A poet is a nightingale who sings in solitude. . ."
3. Tennyson's:

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story;
The long light shakes across the lakes
And the wild cataract leaps in glory."

("natural glory," fabulous walls. Contrast Yeats's "dance like glory" and Coole's actual walls.)

4. Stanza two as concentrated parody of stanzas 30-35 of *Adonais*. Yeats's company gathered regularly and purposively to "knit thoughts into a single thought." Shelley's gathered once, at a funeral, death their one uniting theme and occasion.
5. The Yeatsean group, held whirling upon a compass point till they found direction and certainty; the absence of compass point, mansion, setting, in the case of the Romantics: all solo flights.
6. The terminal, emphatic "head" (*vs.* "heart," the conventional romantic power-term).

Coole Parke, 1929 and the two *Byzantiums* tell why the first

romantic Odyssey never reached Ithaca. *Coole* indicates that the movement had been centreless: no Mermaid Tavern, no Kit Kat Club, no Rhymer's Club, no Woburn Buildings. No Yeats-Pound-Joyce-Ford-Lewis "Vortex." The Byzantium poems indicate that the romantic movement had based itself on a false doctrine of the relations of Art and Nature, which could only end, to quote Coleridge on himself, in Work without Hope. The Nature-mania had, apparently, to be undergone—the collapse of European philosophy and the rise of physical science virtually decreed it—but it was the storm that scattered the romantics' planless fleet almost before it assembled, and drove them miles from anywhere to wreck them one by one on separate islands: where the skylark by day and the nightingale by night taunted them for dying animals, their only relief a draught of vintage, their only hope of escape Death. Skylark and nightingale gradually turned into Harpies as the potent curse which we traced through Locke and Descartes and Newton (which three, Yeats said, "took away the world and gave us its excrement") to the Renaissance and beyond, fulfilled itself in philosophy, politics and art. Bred, as luck would have it, outside the storm-centre, but near enough to know its force and watch its work, in constant intercourse with the finest literary minds of his century, Yeats—the whole new fleet for that matter—altered course and sailed by another route. His song—but one has to call it their song, Pound's, Joyce's, Ford's, Lewis's, for they all had a hand in it—grew louder as they sailed:

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Charles Black

Performance

I played my trumpet in the packed clubcar.
Reaction was equivocal, I fear.
I left the horn uncased and wandered far,
Down to the cabin with the engineer.
I worked the throttle some, then threaded back.
The horn was disassembled, two main pieces
Severed that shouldn't be. I blew my stack,
And pushed an angry path through piled valises.

Later, the line claim-agent paid a call.
We haggled value. Then he tried to fix it
With a pencil, but that didn't work at all.
I love my music. Why'd I have to mix it
With showing off to females on a train
Running to God knows where? I need a brain.

Marvin Mudrick

THE LISTENER AND MR. HAGGIN¹

Twenty years ago B. H. Haggin began contributing to *The Nation* his weekly review of phonograph records; a page of condensed, specific, checkable comment that happened to be the first serious acknowledgment of what might fairly be called the Gutenberg era in the history of music. For the first time, recordings of at least the standard repertory of the concert hall, performed by excellent musicians, were being turned out in quantity by electronic methods that reproduced with recognizable approximation the sounds of live performance; one company advertised, with noteworthy accuracy, "Music You Want When You Want It"; symphonies were becoming as accessible on records as novels in printed books; and the frequent reëxperiencing, in performance, of a large number and variety of musical works—possible, till then, only for professional musicians—became, suddenly, a commonplace for the musical amateur. Mass production had unprecedentedly opened an entire art to a huge naïve audience; and it was to this audience that twenty years ago, in a situation of unexampled difficulty for criticism, Mr. Haggin at once addressed his taste, his honesty, and his awareness of the critic's responsibility:

First let me help the editors of *The Nation* solve a problem. It is the problem that confronts a newspaper editor: He can have a concert written up by a layman, who would write of what a layman would hear at the concert and what everyone who reads the paper will understand. Or if he wants authoritative appraisal he can use an expert, who will talk about things which most of the audience would not hear and most readers will not understand. In this situation the editor likes to believe that if only the expert will use different words everyone will understand him; but the difficulty is not with the words, it is

¹THE LISTENER'S MUSICAL COMPANION, by B. H. Haggin. Rutgers University Press. \$6.00

with the things the words refer to: if the reader has not experienced them, there are no words that he will understand. However, for the editors of *The Nation* the problem is solved by the fact that I am discussing phonograph records; for when I speak of qualities of music and performance which some readers know nothing about, they can listen to the records and hear what I refer to.

For example, in Mozart's early Violin Concerto in G (K. 216) they can hear what is already the true Mozart style and thought without the richness and subtlety of its maturity; they are, then, the better able to perceive, in the high-spirited first movement, the truth of Tovey's observation that Mozart wrote in the language of operatic comedy; but even in the melodic passages about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches from the first groove and about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch before the last groove of the first record they can perceive the fact that he had something to say which transcended this language. They can also hear that these qualities of the work are admirably realized in the performance of Huberman with the Vienna Philharmonic under Dobrowen, I must, however, warn readers not to be repelled by first impressions of Huberman's playing: once they bring themselves to ignore its lack of sensuous attractiveness (which the Viennese recording engineers do less than nothing about) they will hear, in more subtle qualities of inflection and continuity, a wonderful feeling for the phrase. The warning is the more necessary because the stuff that Columbia puts into the grooves of its records generally spoils the results of the first few playings. . . .

Twenty years later, in this age of LP's, when the sales and sheer volume of new records have made record-reviewing a business that engrosses whole sections of popular magazines, and engages the full-time energies of numerous second-string music critics with the standard seventeen-word vocabulary of uncheckable cliché, Mr. Haggin's taste and honesty and heroically scrupulous attention to what is before him decline to be swamped or intimidated; they are in fact more singular, salient, unsubduable, and useful than ever.

The critic who attempts such a lonely job for so unpracticed an audience is frequently confronted, of course, by evidence of its uncomprehending hostility:

...if the critic may not impose his greater insights on the reader, neither may the reader impose lesser insights on the critic.

The reader who tries to do this . . . is someone who, because he cannot hear something, does not believe anyone else can. One could say that he doesn't credit even the critic with insights greater than his own; but the truth is that he isn't aware of insights being involved. . . . He has no understanding of what sort of personal resources—of mind, emotion, character, experience—are involved, along with mere facility in sound, in the creation of good music; or of such personal resources being involved, along with mere facility of fingers, in good performance. And he has no understanding of the fact that an equipment of the same professional caliber—both in sensitiveness to the medium and in personal resources—is involved in good criticism. That is why he is shocked by the critic's disrespect for a composer or violinist, but feels free to be arrogant to the critic.

It is also why he is shocked by the critic's intensity about what he thinks good or bad. That is, he doesn't realize it is the intensity of the professional who cares deeply about his art. Toscanini becomes enraged when a phrase is not as it should be, because that phrase is something he cares about.

And his job is even lonelier because most of his fellow critics, especially in the newspapers and popular magazines, are either, like John Briggs, self-proclaimed cringing partisans of insensibility—

[The critic] is the mouthpiece for the great submerged mass of concert goers who have opinions but no way of expressing them. . . . [he] must share the tastes, viewpoint, enthusiasms and prejudices of his readers, . . . [and] he might well share their limitations also.

or, like the egregious Professor Paul Henry Lang (who has come to his reward, and is now a newspaper critic), musicologists in the Germanic scholarly tradition that equates every fact with every other fact, and that in extreme instances afflicts fact-mongers with the moon-madness to presume that philology equals insight and grants immunity from correction—

A man with a muddled mind [says Mr. Haggin of Professor Lang] which enables him first to suppress the essential part of an argument of Ernest Newman and misrepresent the part he answers, and then to see in a demonstration of this shocking inaccuracy only a "railing at music scholars." Or to scream in the *American Scholar* once against the type of music criticism concerned with "the amorous adventures of singers and vir-

tuosi" which "in our day . . . appears in so-called biographies cf. Ernest Newman's *Liszt*)," and himself to publish in the *Saturday Review of Literature* recently a vulgar account of Liszt's amorous adventures. A man with a muddled, inaccurate mind, whose job at a great university is to teach students in musico-historical research rigor and accuracy.

or most commonly, like the busiest present arbiter of popular taste in classical music, Irving Kolodin of the *Saturday Review*, low-comedy practitioners of "the meaningless jargon of newspaper concert-reviewing"; as for example in Mr. Kolodin's recent *complete* report of a cellist's performance—

Rostropovich impressed these ears more than he had at his recital, partially because he showed himself capable of rising to a demanding occasion, partially because he seemed, after a while, to lose himself in the performance-problem, thus conveying more of his basic artistic personality, which is an appealing one.

To spotlight the *Saturday Review* is neither accidental or unjust. This dogmatically middlebrow magazine relaxed long enough, several years ago, from its popgun assault on modern poetry to initiate an imposing monthly Recordings Section, run by Mr. Kolodin, and eked out with pages of small-print multiple-column diagrammatic reviews that imply scholarly diligence and critical succinctness. Since 1949 Mr. Kolodin has been listed on the Editorial Board of the *Saturday Review*, and within a few years after that date—the Year One of the age of LP's—his pretensions to exhaustiveness, as well as the middlebrow circulation of the magazine, had guaranteed his influence over an audience that is very wide indeed, and far more vulnerable than the audience for modern poetry. No wonder, then, that Mr. Haggin has taken the trouble to point out the carelessness of Mr. Kolodin (who once wrote with knowing familiarity about performances that had never occurred), his inability to hear what is in the performances and on the records he *does* listen to, his corresponding inability to produce anything but a fuzzy mush of performance-problems and appealing basic artistic personalities. No wonder, also, that in the year of Mr. Kolodin's ascension Mr. Haggin's book *Music in the Nation*, a selection of his most precisely discriminating comments on music

and performance and music critics (including Mr. Kolodin), was entrusted by the *Saturday Review* to a hack reviewer, who was permitted (encouraged?) to give this account of the book:

On the strength of Mr. Haggin's title one would naturally expect to encounter a sympathetic, informed concern with the creative impulses, representative institutions and personalities, and qualities of taste and appreciation that characterize the musical life of the country. Instead, he is confronted by a tight little world of the author's own imagining—a world dominated by a handful of subject deities and a rather larger group of alleged frauds, nihilists, ungifted pretenders, and members of the great unwashed.

That Mr. Haggin considers it his job to discuss not only music, but music critics, will continue to be deplored by partisans of insensibility, musicologists who have tasted blood, hack journalists who shovel out parody criticism of phantom performances, dilettantes who require from the critic not perceptions but poetry, and—unhappily—many bewildered members of the very public to whom Mr. Haggin has continuously addressed himself.

For this public he has written his weekly articles (of which *Music in the Nation* is a selection); and in 1944 he published on its behalf an explicitly introductory book. *Music for the Man Who Enjoys "Hamlet"* is a remarkable pioneer attempt at making use of phonograph records to introduce the inexperienced listener to the structures and effects of the very greatest music: one of the most remarkable facts about this adult primer being its refusal to avoid masterpieces ordinarily regarded as "difficult" and "forbidding" (the first work to be discussed is Beethoven's Sonata Opus 111). By the same point-to-point method of musical quotation and accompanying comment that Tovey employed with such illuminating epigrammatic grace, Mr. Haggin presents, examines, describes, and evaluates with his own force and precision what the reader is presumably following in the musical symbols and on the record. If the program of the book seems, nevertheless, too schematic, too austere, and too demanding for the naïve listener (reminding one of Mr. Haggin's early obligatory austerities—pre-LP and pre-diamond-stylus—which forbade record-changers altogether and insisted on a new needle for every record side, and

which therefore protected the unfortunate novice's records but deprived him of the sense of continuity in the music that he may have needed more than unimpaired records)—if the book seems somehow unrealistic in its aims, it may be, in part at least, because the image of the naïve listener that Mr. Haggin begins with has itself a startling unreality:

You reach home, let us say, with expectations of a quiet dinner, of slippers, easy chair, a much read copy of *Hamlet* to take your mind far from the wearying details and arguments and vexations of the long day at the office. And you learn with dismay that this is the night of the third concert of the city's major series, that your wife is going, and you are going with her.

The much read copy of *Hamlet* and the innocence about music may constellate in some personality somewhere; but, even with slippers and a hard day at the office (Mr. Haggin is not at his best when he essays the homely-ingratiating), they do not make up any recognizable representative listener—a listener who is likely to be more generally sophisticated or more generally illiterate than Mr. Haggin's construction, and who needs less help or far more than Mr. Haggin offers, or help of a different kind.

The trouble is that no particular work of art—especially a very great one—can be experienced in isolation from a general sense of the potentialities of its medium, from a sustained peripheral awareness of the simultaneous existence of other great works by the same artist and other artists in the same medium. The paradox of all pedagogy in the arts is that the teacher must often try to give his students a persuasive impression of the magnitude and complexity of a single work, most of whose qualities are in fact undemonstrable to minds ignorant of other works and artists and what they have been able to realize in the same medium. So that the teacher prevents restiveness and alarm in the classroom, and insures that his impression will be received as securely as possible for future deliberation, by means of fill-in lectures and illustrations and asides which provide his students with the temporary, essential illusion of a diversity of direct aesthetic experiences.

Mr. Haggin's handicap, in *Music for the Man Who Enjoys "Hamlet,"* was of course not merely self-imposed and theoretical, it was also economic: 78-rpm records were expensive to produce

and to market, there were only two companies producing virtually all classical recordings issued in this country, and safe investment was the first consideration. Since the major companies steered clear of works outside the standard safe repertory of symphony orchestras and solo virtuosi, and since Mr. Haggin's pedagogic method required him to assume the accessibility only of music already on records (even so, he had to cheat a bit by including "to-be-issued" recordings that were never issued), his "bibliography" of masterpieces was necessarily meager, he could give no comparative idea of the magnitude and complexity of the works he did consider, and he gave no recorded documentation whatever of the composers'—not to mention the medium's—resourcefulness and fertility in works other than the few analyzed.

LP's, unlike 78-rpm records, are inexpensive to produce and to market. Out of this fact has come the stupendous expansion in the recording industry and in the library of recorded music; so that during the past half-dozen years almost every work of every composer of any consequence since Bach—as well as much pre-Bach music—has been finding, among the (by recent count) 373 recording companies, some engineer and the right number of musicians to tape it and put it up for sale to the public, on records that permit uninterrupted listening and that more and more closely approximate the sounds of live performance. What this aesthetic-technological flood-tide has done for Mr. Haggin is to make practical, even for beginners, his method of point-to-point analysis of masterpieces with the aid of recordings; it has enabled him to enrich and vindicate this method by supplementing it with brief comments, in the incisive terminology of the analyses, on many other works by the same and other composers, all available on records; he has the records themselves—the qualities of performance and of sound—to consider; and the result is his new book, *The Listener's Musical Companion*.

The very plan of the book has an engaging directness, economy, and logic. Beginning with remarks on the association between reader and critic—

The critic is a music-lover and listener like his readers: he is the expert and professional listener, who is assumed to have

greater powers of perception and judgment than the amateur, and therefore to be able to make his readers aware of things in the music which they mightn't notice by themselves. He functions as a sort of guidepost, saying in effect: "I hear this happening at this point"—after which his reader listens and may say: "Yes, I hear it too." But he also may say: "No, I hear *this*." That is, the critic uses his powers to animate those of his reader—but only to animate, not to dictate: what he says about a piece of music is true for the reader only if it is confirmed by the reader's own ears. And each critic writes for the group of people who have found his perceptions and evaluations sufficiently confirmed by their own experience.

—it moves in logical progression to a chapter on "the meaning of music," in which historical or biographical or even critical talk about music is split off from the music itself ("if you don't get the meaning of Beethoven's statement from the statement, you won't get it from anything else"); and, concluding the introductory section, it leads the reader by point-to-point analysis through a succession of musical forms of increasing intricacy, as these are embodied in masterpieces that demonstrate not only the mechanical utilization of a pattern, but some of the ways in which masterpieces exploit ready-made patterns and conventional procedures to achieve their own unique effects. Then, chapters on composers; a chapter on performance, in which the insights of Casals, Schnabel, Toscanini are distinguished from the beautiful sounds, expressive of nothing but the performer's virtuosity, produced by Heifetz, Horowitz, Koussevitsky, Stokowski; a chapter on jazz; a chapter, with justifying quotations, on the music critics who *do* have valuable things to say; and, finally, a section of more than one hundred pages of condensed analytic comment on recorded performances of all the works mentioned in the book.

For Mr. Haggin's admirers, there are special satisfactions: a mastery of method, a sufficiency and unimpeachable discretion of comment and illustration, a continuous sense of refreshed specific discoveries among the crowding presences of many dissimilar masterpieces, even a relaxation that seems to flow from the confidence of mastery without blurring any intensity or acuteness of response. So many works by so many composers newly accessible on records seem to give Mr. Haggin too many *good* things to talk

about; in any case, this is the complete adult primer that *Music for the Man Who Enjoys "Hamlet"* could not be.

Everything is arranged as part of a total developing experience. The order of chapters on composers, for example, is neither chronological nor merely honorific: it presupposes a naïve listener and it assumes that certain qualities, not necessarily less than the greatest, of great music are more immediately appreciable than others. Mr. Haggin begins with Beethoven (explosive power and spacious meditateness in large forms, and a lifetime of music that shows, like Shakespeare, an unimpeded growth in resources of spirit as well as resources of technique); goes on to Schubert (melodic loveliness magnificently elaborated in large dramatic forms); then to Mozart ("subtlety in the expression of powerful meanings . . . emotions expressed with an economy and conciseness analogous to what the mathematician calls elegance") and the related idiom of Haydn; then to Berlioz (Mozartian elegance in the use of the medium, tact and fastidiousness in the handling of even the most gigantic orchestral forces); and so on.

The generalized observations on composers are often vigorously heterodox (and always preceded or followed by documentation from the music itself). Brahms is a talented composer in small forms but a pretentious arid craftsman in most of his large-scale works; Tchaikovsky, a composer of intensity, grace, and dramatic power whose qualities have been falsified by the traditional Tchaikovskian performance that distorts, exaggerates, "makes every *p* a *ppp*, every *f* a *fff*"; Bach, a great master in whom "one hears always the operation of prodigious powers . . . but frequently an operation that is not as expressive as it is accomplished"; Wagner, a magician whose extraordinary musical powers are exercised only sporadically and only as interruptions to the "quasi-hypnotic spell" of gorgeous sound to which he sets his cosmically bombastic libretti; Verdi, on the other hand, a working composer who "set to music not philosophically pretentious dramas about gods and heroes of Teutonic mythology, but melodramas about passionate Italians and Spaniards," and who created operas—especially *Otello* and *Falstaff*, but even parts of his earliest, most fervidly melodramatic works—in which the melodic invention of vocal writing

and expressive refinements of orchestral texture are comparable to Mozart's; Mahler, a creator of monumental symphonic structures whose

... employment of ... huge orchestras is not the opulent daubing of Strauss; rather it resembles Berlioz's practice in the fastidiousness, precision and originality of its use, frequently, of now only these few instruments and now only those few to produce contrapuntal textures as clear as they are complex. Mahler's use of the orchestra is in fact only one part of an entire operation that resembles Berlioz's in the fact that nothing in the music is perfunctory or mechanical: if an instrument plays or an inner voice moves, the activity is never a routine instrumental doubling or filling in of texture, but always something done with attention, thought and purpose. And this evidence of a mind always working—working, moreover, in unexpected, individual, original and fascinating ways—holds interest even through one of Mahler's long-winded twenty-minute symphony movements.

Point-to-point analysis is used only sparingly in these chapters, but at decisive moments: as, for example, to contend against academic opinion of Berlioz as a meretricious thunderer by demonstrating the bold, always unexpected, exquisite phrasing of his setting of Gautier's words in *Nuits d'Été*, and the transcendent delicacy of melody and orchestral texture in the Love Scene of his *Romeo and Juliet*. There is in these chapters, however, another sort of point-to-point method that is quite new for the author, made possible by the almost limitless new library of recorded music: what gives the book its unique character and pedagogic value is, not just the quality of the insights (many of which we have come across before in his articles and his other books: Mr. Haggin is a critic, not an aesthete, and he has no objection to repeating statements of his own that seem to him definitive of his views), but their sustained and exhaustive discriminating variety—page after page of descriptive comment in which he distinguishes, with his customary unawed directness that invites (and rewards) checking, among an exhaustive variety of works, down to single movements, arias, themes, even turns of phrase.

[Mozart's Piano Concerto] K-466 ... begins with what is perhaps the most powerful of Mozart's instrumental move-

ments. The power of the hushed D-minor opening passage is an example of effect on the mind out of all proportion to the impingement on the senses: it is achieved by nothing more than the agitated syncopations of violins and violas, the quiet eruptions of cellos and basses, with not even one of the kettledrum-strokes that punctuate those eruptions in the orchestral outburst a moment later. . . .

• • •

I mentioned earlier—as against the expansiveness of the *Eroica* Symphony—the concentration in the first movement of the Fifth; and other examples are the powerfully concise *Coriolan* and *Egmont* Overtures, the fiercely concise opening movement of the Quartet Op. 95. . . . But there are also remarkable examples of expansiveness to take note of: the endlessly and delightfully inventive second movement of the Quartet Op. 59 No. 1; the second movement of the Quartet Op. 59 No. 3, with a strangeness in its poignancy that leads Sullivan to speak of its “remote and frozen anguish.”

The operation of the same unceasingly attentive critical mind is manifested—most uniquely, with an honesty and directness of idiom that Mr. Haggin may be said to have invented, and that takes the reader always back to the object—in the characteristically concise and full concluding section on recorded performances. There is, first of all, Mr. Haggin's unrelenting presentation, detail by detail, of the heartbreaking facts about the post-war Toscanini recordings: their dry, hard, unresonant, though usually at least clear sound; the monstrous perversions and distortions introduced into many of these recordings by the “enhancement” processes of RCA-Victor's incredible engineers, as in the last “improved” version of the *Eroica*—

. . . the violin sound is changed into a liquid stream of electronic gloss; and there is a similar liquefying and blurring all the way down, which dissolves the solidity and clean definition of chords, drum-beats, and bass-notes into a mush of rumble. Moreover, with treble peaked and bass down the sound is much brighter but shallower, and the timbres of some of the instruments are altered: the horn sounds more like a trumpet; the trumpet's sound is sharpened, and may spread or split; the change from dark to light and from dry to glossy makes the cellos unrecog-

nizable; the gloss similarly falsifies the sound of the clarinet, the bassoon. . . .
—the same perversions and distortions introduced even into many later, superb Toscanini recordings by the same botchers (one of whom had the unctuous gall to state, in a recently published reverential article about Toscanini and recording, that the one thing Toscanini has *never* permitted engineers to do is to alter the quality of the original auditorium sound!). And there are pleasanter facts, noted with the same clarity that equally invites the reader to find out for himself:

Nat's performance of [Chopin's Sonata] Op. 35 . . . gives us the work undistorted and unsentimentalized by the usual exaggerated rubato—with, instead, inflections of pace governed by a sense for continuity and coherence. I would therefore choose it even though he uses a piano whose insufficiently resonant sound is poorly reproduced.

* * *

In the Toscanini broadcasts of Verdi's operas issued by Victor the inadequacies of some of the singing and the defects of the reproduced sound are negligible in comparison with what the performances give. . . . We have. . . . never . . . heard the orchestral parts played with such exquisite modeling of phrase, such balance of sonorities and clarity of texture, such plastic coherence, such hair-raising power in the climaxes, contributed by an orchestra of symphonic caliber not often heard in performances of Verdi. And it is literally true that we have never heard the orchestral parts with the effect they have when played this way. . . .

"Each critic," says Mr. Haggin, "writes for the group of people who have found his perceptions and evaluations sufficiently confirmed by their own experience." It is reasonable to hope that the group for whom Mr. Haggin writes will grow very much larger, by the stimulus of this inexhaustible book which describes, defines, and sums up a whole new era of musical history and in a crucial sense the whole history of music. For one of his readers, at any rate, this is the best introductory text, and the best listener's book, on music ever written.

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